

Can a career in pharmacy be science-based?

By Elliott M. Sogol, PhD



Searching for that first position in pharmacy? Well, the number of options and opportunities that await you in this exciting and rewarding profession is tremendous. Of course, there are some questions you need to answer before choosing your career path: What do I want to do? How do I get there? Can I apply any of that science-based education I acquired?

When you are looking for that first position as a health care professional, you are not just looking for a job—you are looking for a career. Ask yourself what types of activities you should undertake. List the responsibilities and characteristics you feel you must have in a position. Are you looking to apply scientific knowledge? Work with other health care providers? Have weekends off? Whatever your thoughts, begin with this list of personal and professional interests and then identify positions that match your needs and desires.

So, one of your top priorities is having the ability to apply scientific knowledge within your practice. Really? Did I really write that? You want to apply the science that you just spent a minimum of 6 years learning? Wow, is that even possible?

In fact, every career path in pharmacy provides the opportunity

to apply some or all of the scientific, medical, and clinical knowledge you have acquired. The differences lie in the type, discipline, amount used, speed necessary to recall information, and need to continually update specific areas of information.

Recent media reports on compounding in pharmacy point to the importance of understanding the science behind different delivery vehicles and how specific products can or cannot be absorbed through different routes. Without the science, pharmacists are unable to determine if a product they compound will have the desired effect or if the vehicle used will actually deliver the medication. For compounding, as with any other area in pharmacy, practitioners need to review studies and understand the science in order to gain the information they need to make an informed decision.

Science also provides the foundation for drug development. Applying knowledge in a research and development environment can be both rewarding and challenging. Also, pre-clinical and clinical research require the application of scientific, medical, and clinical knowledge all together. A very specialized science-based career in industry is that of science liaison. While each company has a different title for this position, the underlying functions are to communicate to a variety of practitioners how science can be translated into practice and to provide a mechanism for dialogue between pharmacists, physicians, nurses, patients, and other members of the health care team.

Another avenue is academics. Many consider a pharmacy career in academics to be just the teaching of social and administrative pharmacy, pharmacy practice, and pharmaceutical sciences, as well as the research conducted by faculty members. However, numerous pharmacists serve as preceptors in all areas of practice, and they must keep up-to-date on the science to best meet the needs of students and patients they work with. Residency program directors thrive on science-based knowledge, providing the opportunities for residents to apply their knowledge in daily interactions and through research.

Science-based practice is really what practitioners do each and every day. When pharmacists provide medication therapy management services for patients, they determine the appropriate dose of the prescribed medication or whether patients should change or stop medications. These decisions and communications are based on science and scientific inquiry that have been translated by pharmacists and others into improved medication use. Applying science is a daily function of pharmacy practitioners. You just need to recognize the role that science plays in what you do and then use that knowledge to advance patient care.

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