

Selecting the right residency program

Pharmacy is becoming a patient-oriented profession.¹ To prepare for a professionwide, patient-centered practice model, growth of residency programs will be necessary.¹ A residency is a postgraduate training program in a defined area of pharmacy practice that can improve skills, build confidence, and provide a competitive edge in the job market.² Deciding whether to complete a residency is a crucial decision for the pharmacy student or new graduate. Just as important is the choice of a specific program.

Types of residency programs. The first residency programs were offered in the 1930s.² Today, 700 residency programs in 49 states and Puerto Rico are accredited by the American Society of Health-System Pharmacists (ASHP).^{3,4} The general pharmacy practice residency, the most common type of postgraduate training program, provides experience in a broad range of areas. Specialized residencies usually focus on one particular area of practice, such as critical care or oncology. Depending on one's initial career goals and experience, completing a general pharmacy practice residency may be required before moving on to a specialized residency or acquiring a midlevel position. Advanced residencies in pharmacy practice management and managed care pharmacy systems are also available. Residency training can take place in hospitals, community pharmacies, ambulatory care centers, long-term-care facilities, managed care facilities, the pharmaceutical

industry, academic institutions, and professional organizations.⁴

Selecting a residency program. A directory of general pharmacy practice and specialized residencies is available from ASHP.⁵ Programs can be searched for by state, program type, or institution. Each listing gives accreditation status, contact information, special features, fringe benefits, application requirements, and other useful information. Research should include visiting the Web site of the training institution and contacting the residency program coordinator. Information on accredited and nonaccredited programs can also be obtained from the American Pharmacists Association,⁶ the Academy of Managed Care Pharmacy,⁷ and the American College of Clinical Pharmacy.⁸

In searching for the right residency program, one of the first questions to answer is whether to pursue an accredited or nonaccredited program. Accredited programs have to meet certain standards. In addition, accredited programs are subjected to continuous quality improvement and are reviewed by residency preceptors or program directors. Accredited programs must ensure that residents achieve specified competencies and must offer an appropriate training environment.³

The residency should dovetail with one's career goals. For someone who is interested in running a clinic in a community setting, a hospital pharmacy residency may not provide the most useful experience. Similarly, a future career in

pharmacy administration would not be appropriately served by an ambulatory care residency.

Another factor to consider is location. A residency program may have everything that a prospective candidate is looking for but be located far from family and friends. Although a residency is designed to help a practitioner grow professionally, emotional support may be a key to successful completion.

Some residency programs are more flexible than others. Can the program's goals be tailored to match the goals of the resident? How many of the rotations are elective? Are there opportunities to work additional hours to supplement the stipend? Does the training site offer a house-call program, activities in an academic setting, or other innovations that will enrich the training experience? Flexibility can allow the resident to explore his or her unique interests and enable the training site to maneuver around unexpected events.

ASHP Residency Showcase and Personnel Placement Service. The ASHP Midyear Clinical Meeting (MCM) hosts a Residency Showcase involving all ASHP-accredited and accreditation-pending general pharmacy practice residencies. Residency programs that are not ASHP accredited or that are recruiting their first residency class may also be featured. The Showcase, which usually lasts from Monday morning to Tuesday afternoon during the MCM week, allows prospective residents the chance to meet program representatives in person, explore programs from around the country, gather information on applicant requirements, pick up an application packet, and network with peers.

Residency programs featured in the Showcase offer residencies through the Resident Matching Program managed by the National Matching Service, which seeks to pair prospective residents with

The New Practitioners Forum column features articles that address the special professional needs of pharmacists early in their careers as they transition from students to practitioners. Authors include new practitioners or others with expertise in a topic of interest to new practitioners. AJHP readers are invited to submit topics or articles for this column to the New Practitioners Forum, c/o Jill Haug, 7272 Wisconsin Avenue, Bethesda, MD 20814 (301-664-8821 or newpractitioners@ashp.org).

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training sites.⁹ The matching process requires applicants to first apply directly to residency programs; both the training site and the applicant must list each other on their respective matching lists for a possible match to occur.

The MCM offers a career assistance program, CareerPharm's Personnel Placement Service (PPS), which features some generalized residencies, specialized residencies, other training programs (such as fellowships), and employment opportunities.² The PPS is unique in that, unlike the Residency Showcase, there are opportunities for face-to-face interviews between candidates and employers. Further information about the upcoming MCM, Residency Showcase, and PPS is available through ASHP's Web site.¹⁰

Interviewing for a residency. The MCM may present opportunities for an initial interview, or preliminary interviews may happen over the telephone. The interviewer will gather a variety of information about the prospective resident, including qualifications, leadership roles, service activities, professional affiliations, and personal characteristics. The first interview is usually brief (30 minutes or less) and to the point, so it is imperative for the candidate to make a good first impression and show genuine interest in the program. The second interview, if it occurs, may take place at the institution sponsoring the residency. This onsite interview may last all day and require an overnight stay in the area. The second interview should be viewed as an opportunity for both prospective resident and preceptors to interrogate each other. It also lets one meet the staff and see the training site's facilities, equipment, and technology.

The interviews should convey an accurate impression of the total residency program and the expectations the resident and the preceptors have for each

other. The potential resident should also come away informed about down-to-earth matters like the cost of living in the area, traffic, affordable places to live, and recreational opportunities. If further information is needed, the residency coordinator should be contacted.

To prepare for the interviews, past accomplishments and future goals should be written down for easy reference. Practicing answers in front of a mirror or with a tape recorder can allow imperfections to be corrected. Asking peers to act as the employer in a mock interview may help bring attention to certain attitudes, behaviors, and statements that need improvement. These preparation techniques can also help ease nervousness.

There may be a chance to discuss the residency program with current residents to gain insights and frank opinions that may not otherwise be obtainable. Details that may be useful to investigate include resident's daily responsibilities, the workload, preceptors' availability, staff complaints, and other potential friction points.

Candidates will be doing themselves a favor by being honest during interviews and expecting the same from those with whom they speak.

Going for a second-year residency or fellowship. Graduates of general pharmacy practice residencies may wish to pursue additional training. CareerPharm provides descriptions of 17 specialized residencies.¹¹ Attending the MCM enables one to explore specialized residencies and fellowships; the institution or training site may pay for a resident to go to the MCM.³ Additional training may be available at the resident's current site. Although additional training may mean sacrificing a good salary for another year or two, the end result may open doors that could otherwise remain closed.

Conclusion. Choosing a residency program that matches one's objectives and characteristics will benefit one's pro-

fessional career and advance the pharmacy profession.

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