



**Royal
Pharmaceutical
Society**
of Great Britain

CAREER AS A PHARMACY TECHNICIAN?

Entry and training routes

There are no minimum entry requirements, although you will usually be expected to have 4 GCSEs at Grade C or above, or the equivalent, including English, science and maths. You will then need to obtain a trainee post at a hospital or within a community pharmacy.

The awarding bodies for the qualification are City and Guilds, Edexcel and the Scottish Qualifications Authority.

Pharmacy technicians need to gain an NVQ/SVQ in Pharmacy Services at level 3. This qualification is needed to register with the Royal Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain (RPSGB). The RPSGB opened the voluntary register of pharmacy technicians in January 2005 – registration is likely to become statutory in future. Other qualifications at the same level may be accepted – please check.

The main route into this work is by finding a job with an employer. Recruits enter a training programme which usually lasts for around two years. It includes on-the-job training with instruction from experienced staff and overall supervision from pharmacists.

Trainees study part-time for NVQs/SVQs in Pharmacy Services at level 3 – this may be via college courses or open learning. Off-the-job training may lead to Technical Certificates.

There may be opportunities to enter through special training schemes (e.g. Advanced Apprenticeships). These are work-based training programmes that lead to vocational qualifications. Technicians work towards NVQs/SVQs in Pharmacy Services at level 3.

Types of pharmacy technician

Most pharmacy technicians in the NHS work in one of two areas, **hospital pharmacy** and **community pharmacy**. The pharmacy technician will prepare and deliver drugs, store incoming drugs and make up sterile preparations.

Some pharmacy technicians now also work for **primary care** organisations, providing advice on pharmacy services to local GP's and others.

Working as a hospital pharmacy technician

Hospital pharmacy technicians assist the hospital pharmacist. Most of the work involves dispensing drugs and medicines under supervision by a pharmacist and manufacturing individual medicines and batch medicines.

They make sure that each hospital department and ward has enough supplies and the correct dosages for patients. Technicians also check stock levels and make sure

that the correct orders are made to the pharmaceutical companies. These orders are often made using a computer, and much greater use is being made of the technicians "IT skills."

Senior technicians can specialise in analytical control for checking the quality of hospital medicines and in the preparation of radioactive materials under the supervision of a pharmacist.

A hospital pharmacy technician can also work in, education and training of staff, management, IT, procurement, clinical trials and drug information services.

Working as a community pharmacy technician

Community pharmacy technicians help qualified pharmacists with their work in retail outlets and assist with labelling and dispensing drugs and issuing pre-packaged prescriptions. They are also responsible for ensuring that prescriptions are legal, accurate, and that there are no errors or forgery.

Technicians have a wide range of other tasks, including:

- Making simple dilutions or counting the prescribed number of tablets
- Manufacturing ointment mixtures
- Assisting with services to nursing homes and the supply of oxygen.
- Helping the pharmacist in a range of other duties such as stock checking and ordering.
- Keeping individual records of patients prescriptions, usually stored on a computer.

Technicians may have to sell over-the-counter medicines and other items stocked by the chemist, such as cosmetics, toiletries, baby food and photographic supplies. Customers may seek advice and information on the use of medicines or general health issues, and the pharmacy technician must know when to refer the customer to the pharmacist or another health care professional.

Career prospects:

In the hospital service, there are five grades for qualified pharmacy technicians. Senior technicians can specialise in areas such as analytical control for checking the quality of hospital medicines, preparing radioactive materials, staff training, information technology, supplies procurement, clinical trials or drug information services. A new expanding role is that of clinical technician, which involves working on wards, liaising with other healthcare professionals and closer contact with patients. A chief technician is often responsible for managing a section of the pharmacy department.

How to apply:

Hospital posts: You should write directly to hospital personnel departments or chief pharmacists.

Community posts: Write directly to local community pharmacies.

Primary care posts: Get experience through hospital or community posts.