

PURSUING AN INDUSTRY FELLOWSHIP: PREPARING FOR, INTERVIEWING FOR, AND SECURING A POST-PHARMD FELLOWSHIP

PREFACE

After graduating from pharmacy school, I became one of the first industry fellows (ever). At that time, pharmaceutical company employers were unsure of the role PharmDs could play within industry. As a result, fellowships were founded to integrate the new concepts of PharmDs and clinical pharmacy into industry and to explore new ways that clinically trained pharmacists could contribute. Over the years, I have been fortunate to participate in the evolution of industry pharmacy during my successive roles as i) student intern, ii) fellowship applicant, iii) fellow, iv) fellowship preceptor, v) company fellowship program director, vi) Rutgers fellowship program director, vii) Founder of the Industry Pharmacists Organization (IPhO), and viii) Founder of the IPhO National Fellows Council. During this time, fellowship programs expanded exponentially. Today nearly 400 PharmDs participate in these programs at 70 different sponsors. Amazingly, 400 represents the number of fellows I trained in the Rutgers program over a 10-year period from 2001-2011! The growth and appeal of these programs is very clear. Some things have not changed, however. Similar to many of today's student pharmacists, I was amazed when I first learned that there were roles for pharmacists in pharmaceutical industry. There were so many diverse opportunities I was unaware of!

I thought to myself, "could there really be a parallel universe of rewarding career options out there that no one told me about?" As I discovered through my own rewarding career journey, the answer to that question was (and still is) a resounding yes! Although much time has passed, today's student pharmacists still lack exposure to the industry and the roles that pharmacists can play, and it seems harder than ever to find a successful pathway to enter the industry. It's one of the reasons that I founded the Industry Pharmacists Organization (IPhO), and one of the main reasons that Kimberly Gittings and I authored this book.

I often hear comments from students like, "our faculty discourages us from considering industry careers - they call it joining the dark side" or "my school doesn't teach students anything about industry." Students - it isn't their fault! We need to be mindful that a significant minority (roughly 2-3%) of pharmacists ever work in industry so most pharmacy schools cannot justify a dedicated curricular track for an industry-focused career path. Additionally, the Accreditation Council for Pharmacy Education (ACPE) is placing ever-increasing demands on ACPE-accredited pharmacy schools, making it challenging to deliver the core curriculum that supports the most common clinical pharmacy roles (let alone trying to cater to specialization). As a result,

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it seems that the needs of the many continue to outweigh the needs of the few. The gaps in awareness, understanding, and experiential opportunities are as prevalent today as they ever have been.

There are other significant challenges for pharmacists who want to work in industry. Most notably, even entry-level roles for industry pharmacists usually require prior experience and/or skillsets that graduating pharmacists don't have! As a result, pharmaceutical industry employers aren't knocking down the doors of pharmacy schools to hire new graduates. PharmDs with clinical knowledge have an outstanding foundation to work in industry, especially given the exponential growth of specialty pharmaceuticals, biologics, managed care, evidence-based/value-based medicine, and the Medical Science Liaison (MSL) role that employs about 2,000 pharmacists in the US alone. Still, pharmacists almost always need "something else" in order to get into industry after earning their Doctor of Pharmacy degree. This experience gap has helped to fuel the growth of fellowship programs at a dramatic rate. Thanks to highly successful outcomes over several decades, these programs have demonstrated that they can deliver the necessary experience and training to transform high potential, newly minted pharmacists into outstanding contributors in industry.

Seemingly every industry employer now wants PharmD fellows, and fellowship sponsors are now training fellows in multiple different functions within their corporate structure. Employers like Novartis, Bristol-Myers Squibb, and others currently employ well over 100 PharmD industry fellowship alumni, including many who have reached senior, decision-making levels in the company.

When I became a fellow, no one had yet successfully completed the Rutgers program. You could count all of the industry fellows in the United States on one hand so it was extremely competitive to land one of these rare positions. Despite the exponential growth of fellowship programs, the application process remains very competitive. More students than ever are seeking alternatives to traditional pharmacy practice and they are highly attracted to the promise that these fellowship programs offer. Today, more than 80% of fellowship applicants do not successfully secure a position. Due to increasing competition and decreasing success rates, candidates are doing everything possible to learn more about what makes an ideal fellowship candidate, to secure hard-to-find experiential opportunities, and to develop strategies that can i) meet the basics expected from candidates and ii) help them stand out among the crowd of talented, qualified candidates.

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In recent years, many company program directors/preceptors have become increasingly concerned because the time, effort, and financial resources expended to recruit a fellow often exceed the employer's recruitment expenditure for a mid- to senior-level executive! Fellowship sponsors are collectively spending about \$1 million annually to recruit fellows at the ASHP Midyear meeting. This level of expenditure may be unsustainable, so in the future the application process could very well conform to the standard practices employers use to recruit most employees. In the future, perhaps employers will consider hiring PharmDs right out of school as full time employees and just provide them with the training they need - fellowships have proven that this formula works. Unfortunately, this is not the case today. With employers dedicating so much effort into recruiting the ideal fellow, it is no surprise that as an applicant you need all the help you can get to prepare for an increasingly complex, sophisticated, expensive process. It may in fact be the most difficult, intimidating job interview you ever experience in your career! We hope to alleviate some of the stress of this process and provide you with all the help we can along the way!

This book dissects and demystifies the fellowship program enterprise and provides the help and advice student pharmacists need to become successful, competitive candidates for these programs. We provide detailed suggestions for you that range from strategies upon first entering pharmacy school, to later stage tips on navigating the fellowship application, interviewing, and offer processes. Best of all, through this book you will benefit from the insights of two co-authors - Dr. Kimberly Gittings, an accomplished PharmD graduate who recently navigated this complex process successfully, and myself, a fellowship program veteran of many years. Kimberly and I hope that you will find our advice helpful, as well as the collection of employer perspectives and shared stories from fellowship applicants' triumphs and failures that are interspersed throughout the book. Enjoy your journey and good luck in securing a fellowship position!



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CHAPTERS:

1. Preparing early in your pharmacy career
2. Preparing your Curriculum Vitae and Letters of Recommendation
3. Navigating the ASHP Personal Placement System
4. Fellowship opportunities not listed through PPS
5. Midyear
6. On-site interviews
7. After on-site interviews
8. What to do if you don't secure a fellowship position
9. Accepting and preparing for a fellowship position

APPENDICES:

- A. Timeline of preparation
- B. Checklist to pack for Midyear
- C. Example organization chart for letters of recommendation
- D. Sample interview questions
- E. Questions to ask during interviews