

Career Profile: Pharmacist

A pharmacist dispenses drugs prescribed by physicians and other health practitioners and informs patients about medications and their use. S/he advises physicians and other health practitioners on the selection, dosages, interactions, and side effects of medications and also monitors the health and progress of patients in response to drug therapy in order to ensure safe and effective use of medications. In order to do these things the pharmacist has to understand the use, clinical effects and composition of drugs and their chemical, biological and physical properties.

There are several career paths within pharmacy. You could work in a community setting in a retail pharmacy, or in a healthcare facility such as a hospital, nursing home or mental health institution, or look to work in a pharmaceutical company in research, or sales and marketing. You could also specialize in specific drug therapy areas such as oncology (cancer), nuclear pharmacy or geriatric pharmacy. The direction you choose to follow will impact on the type of activities you would be expected to perform.

Here is a sample of typical activities drawn from the various situations:

- dispense medications
- counsel patients and answer questions about prescription drugs
- provide information about over-the-counter drugs, including questions about possible side effects or interactions among various drugs
- provide specialized services to help patients manage conditions such as diabetes or high blood pressure
- advise medical staff on the selection and effects of drugs
- assess, plan and monitor drug programmes or regimens
- buy medical supplies
- issue stock to wards, theatres and patients
- take stock, do cycle counting and control inventory
- keep confidential computerized records of patients' drug therapies to prevent harmful drug interactions
- carry out research to develop new drugs and therapies and test their effects on people
- ensure the correct disposal of hazardous waste drugs.

Education Requirements

National Senior Certificate (NSC)

For a career in pharmacy students are advised to select English and Mathematics, and Biology or Science. These are subjects that are particularly suitable for tertiary study. Some of the universities, e.g Wits, require prospective students to write a Health Consortium Test as an entry requirement.

Bachelor Degree

Bachelor of Pharmacy BPharm – (4 years)

A four year degree programme that focuses on developing knowledge and skills for entry into careers in the pharmaceutical.

Offered at:

- [North-West University](#)¹ (School of Pharmacy, Potchefstroom Campus)
- [University of Limpopo](#)² (Department of Pharmacy) in partnership with [Tshwane University of Technology](#)³ (Department of Pharmaceutical Sciences)
- [University of the Witwatersrand](#)⁴ (Faculty of Health Sciences, BPharm (4 years))

Possible Employers

- Retail (private) pharmacies
- Hospitals and clinics
- Provincial administrations
- Department of Health
- Research institutes
- Pharmaceutical manufacturers, e.g. Abbott, Adcock Ingram, Merck
- [Pharmaceutical Industry Association of South Africa](#)⁵
- Universities
- Own business

Find out more

- [Dis-Chem Academy for Pharmacist Assistants](#)⁶.
- [Medical career information](#)⁷.
- The [National Association of Pharmaceutical manufacturers](#)⁸ has about 20 members, most of whom manufacture generic medicines.
- This document outlines the role and functioning of the [SA Pharmacy Council](#)⁹.
- A useful brochure outlining the [pharmacy profession and training requirements](#)¹⁰.
- A report from the [International Federation of Hospital Pharmacy \(FIP\)](#)¹¹ on a global conference held in 2008 gives a broader perspective on issues important to hospital pharmacists.

¹ http://www.puk.ac.za/fakulteite/gesond/farmasie/bpharm/b.pharm_index_e.html

² http://www.ul.ac.za/index.php?Entity=dep_pharmacy

³ <http://www.tut.ac.za/Students/facultiesdepartments/science/departments/pharmascience/Pages/default.aspx>

⁴ <http://web.wits.ac.za/Academic/Health/AcademicProgrammes/>

⁵ http://www.sapma.co.za/page.php?p_id=4

⁶ <http://www.dischem.co.za/article.asp?articleID=612>

⁷ <http://www.medicalcareerinfo.com/pharmacists.htm>

⁸ <http://www.napm.co.za/index.html>

⁹ <http://www.pharmcouncil.co.za/documents/SAPC%20Information%20sheet.pdf>

¹⁰ <http://www.pharmcouncil.co.za/documents/Career%20as%20a%20Pharmacist%20in%20South%20Africa.pdf>

¹¹ http://www.saahip.org.za/docs/Basel_Statements_Future_of_Hosp_Pharmacy_Dec_2008.pdf

- There is an interesting [BPharm degree](#) offered jointly by the Medunsa campus of the University of Limpopo and the Tshwane University of Technology. This website outlines the problem based learning approach used.

Are you suited to this career?

This quick quiz can help you to identify whether you are suited for this career.

Quiz	YES	NO
Are you interested in helping people?		
Do you pay attention to detail?		
Are you comfortable about making decisions that may impact on other people's lives?		
Are you a good listener and do communicate your ideas clearly?		
Are detail and accuracy in your work important to you?		
Are you computer literate?		
Do you have a good business sense?		
Do you work well with other people and communicate clearly with them?		
Do you have good health and stamina?		
Do scientific developments in the health field interest you and would you like to be involved in medical research?		

If you have mainly yes answers it may be an indication that this is a career to consider.