PREPARING FOR YOUR CAREER In Pharmacy

So, you want to be a pharmacist?
Start planning now.

The decision to pursue a career in pharmacy is an excellent choice. Pharmacists help patients overcome illnesses and advocate wellness every day. Pharmacy offers diverse career options, attractive salaries, a comfortable work environment, and flexible hours. Sounds great, right? But these luxuries don’t come without work - the educational process to become a pharmacist is intense. To become a pharmacist, you must complete a Doctor of Pharmacy (PharmD) degree. Obtaining a PharmD requires three years of pre-pharmacy and four years of pharmacy coursework. Because pharmacists are crucial components of the health care team, obtaining a pharmacy degree today is on par with attending medical school.

HIGH SCHOOL PREP
While still in high school, you should meet with a guidance counselor to ensure that all the required college prep courses are being taken. High school courses that are important include physics, chemistry, biology, and math. Visit the UT College of Pharmacy web site at www.uthsc.edu/pharmacy and click on Future Students to get a glimpse of what college courses are required for entry.

Applicants also need to take courses that enhance verbal skills. Communication skills are extremely important in any health care profession, since practitioners will be expected to communicate with patients, caregivers, and other medical professionals.

COLLEGE PREP
Prior to entering the UT College of Pharmacy, students are required to complete three years of pre-pharmacy coursework at the college level. You might want to consider focused studies in math and science courses to sharpen your skills and build a solid foundation for courses you will take in pharmacy school. Required courses are listed on the UT College of Pharmacy website. Recent developments suggest that more students are taking a three- or four-year pre-pharmacy program to enhance their performance in pharmacy school. At the UT College of Pharmacy, approximately 85% of our students have a degree before they enroll in pharmacy school.

UT requires that applicants take the PCAT exam, which is the Pharmacy College Admission Test. UT strongly recommends that undergraduate courses, particularly science and math courses, be taken at accredited 4-year colleges or universities.

Get some pharmacy knowledge by working in a pharmacy or shadowing pharmacists in different specialties. Be sure that you know what the career of pharmacy has to offer and that you are committed to completing your education and going into practice at graduation.

Get involved in college and community activities. Become an active participant and leader in organizations, particularly service organizations. There are many opportunities, both in college-affiliated groups and in outside organizations.

PHARMACY SCHOOL
Once in pharmacy school, courses are more specific. However, most schools of pharmacy combine required courses with a broad range of professional elective options. At UT, pharmacy students attend typical lecture and lab classes for 2½ years, and then undertake a broad range of month-long clinical rotations and elective courses for the next 1½ years.

Students can also study issues pertinent to their desired career areas, such as dynamics of patient management, issues in home health care delivery, or the biology of aging. Students intending to enter the retail world can take courses in community practice, which often include internships at local pharmacies.

Upon graduation, a license to practice pharmacy is required in all states. To obtain a license, you need to complete an internship under a licensed pharmacist, graduate from an accredited college of pharmacy, and pass a state examination. As of 2012, there are over 125 colleges and schools of pharmacy with professional degree programs.

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