

## Director's Forum

### What to Look for in Your First Job

Eun Jin Ree, PharmD (C),\* and Robert J. Weber, PharmD, MS, BCPS†

The first job is very important in setting a trajectory for career development and progress. Although new pharmacy graduates will generally enjoy excellent job opportunities, they need to consider specific factors in choosing their first job. In addition, the increased number of pharmacy schools has produced more pharmacy graduates, leading to more competition for jobs. This tight job market may cause students or residents to make a hasty decision about their first job. The goal of this *Director's Forum* is to provide guidance to young pharmacists as they choose their first job after schooling or training. This article specifically addresses the importance of the first job on career and personal development, lists the specific considerations in finding and deciding on the first job, and presents some experiences from others that may highlight possible pitfalls in choosing the first job. We hope the information in this article will provide some guidance to young pharmacists in choosing a job that meets the goals of their life plan while helping them to develop a career focused on providing patient-centered pharmacy services.

Pharmacists are among the most respected professionals; their jobs rank fifth overall in the 2014 List of Best Jobs and third in the list of Best Health Care Jobs.<sup>1</sup> According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) reports, the number of job opportunities for pharmacists will rise 14% from 2012 to 2022.<sup>2</sup> New pharmacy roles and jobs will be found in a variety of settings, such as physicians' offices, outpatient health care clinics, senior care facilities, and pharmacy academia.

Even though pharmacy graduates will generally enjoy excellent job opportunities, they need to consider specific factors in choosing their first job. The increased number of pharmacy schools from 82 in 2000 to 133 in 2014 has produced more pharmacy graduates, leading to more competition for jobs.<sup>3,4</sup> According to the Pharmacy Manpower Project Inc, current demand for pharmacists is relatively low compared to previous years. Using a 5-point index scale, where 1 indicates a surplus of pharmacists and 5 a high demand, the Aggregate Demand Index (ADI) for April 2014 and June 2014 was 3.30 and 3.27,

respectively.<sup>5</sup> Although demand is still slightly higher than supply in 2014 compared with April 2013 (ADI 3.21), the demand for pharmacists has seen a somewhat dramatic decline from 4.09 in 2007, to 3.96 in 2008, and to 3.79 in 2009.<sup>5,6</sup> Also based on 2012 statistics, the unemployment rate among new pharmacy graduates was higher than 20%.<sup>7</sup> This means that the market conditions for new graduates are very different compared to when they entered pharmacy school. This tight job market may cause students or residents to make a hasty decision, not realizing the importance of their first job.

The goal of this article is to provide guidance to young pharmacists as they decide on their first job after schooling or training. This article specifically addresses the importance of the first job on career and personal development, lists the specific considerations in finding and deciding on the first job, and presents some experiences from others that may highlight potential pitfalls in choosing the first job. We hope the information in this article will provide some guidance to young pharmacists in choosing a job

\*PharmD Candidate, Ohio State University College of Pharmacy; †Administrator Pharmacy Services, The Ohio State University Wexner Medical Center, Columbus, Ohio

that meets the goals of their life plan and helps them to develop a career focused on providing patient-centered pharmacy services.

### THE IMPORTANCE OF THE FIRST JOB

Your first job gives you a chance to know and understand yourself better, because of your increased opportunity to interact with other people and take responsibility for your work within a team. Although you have had professors, colleagues, and advisors who have guided you through the various steps of education and training during pharmacy school, residency, and fellowships, a job as a licensed and specialized pharmacist provides you with a sole responsibility for drug therapy outcomes and with accountability directly for patients. Through feedback from coworkers, bosses, and patients, you will come to see yourself more objectively and will be able to reflect on your work, attitudes, communication skills, and professional skills. You will begin to identify your real strengths and weaknesses as a professional in the workplace, which will contribute to your individual growth. Experiences in your first job will help you find the most suitable career fit by directing how you approach looking for future jobs.

Your first job places you on a career trajectory that you will most likely follow for some time, and your first job will help shape who you will be at the end of your career. In your first job, you will absorb everything you see, listen to, and feel, and this will stay with you for the rest of your career. Ideally, you should enjoy the work you do in your first job, but you should also be learning skills that will help you accomplish your future goals. Your first job is a great opportunity to examine your capability as a professional and to determine whether the skills you are developing contribute meaningfully to your ultimate career goal.

The people you meet at your first job can become important resources and colleagues as you advance in your career. In the workplace, everyone gathers together for same mission and vision, but each individual has a different educational and cultural background, as well as work and internship experiences. Almost anyone (physician, technician, and administrator) you meet in your first job can become a mentor who broadens your perspective and deepens your insights, personally and professionally. The mentors in your first job will play a key role in guiding you through your professional career.

### RELEVANT CONSIDERATIONS IN FINDING YOUR FIRST JOB

A key and necessary ingredient to finding the right first job is self-awareness. Simply stated, this means that you should think through a series of key questions about who you are in relation to what kind of work you want to do. What makes you happy? What do you need in your life? What is your practice philosophy? What is your passion? This knowledge differs from person to person and is discerned through thoughtful introspection and discussion with mentors, close friends, and colleagues. In her *Letter to Young Pharmacists*, Dr. Pamela A. Pletz<sup>8</sup> emphasizes the importance of self-knowledge as an important tool in determining one's career path. Dr. Pletz came to greater self-knowledge by reflecting on previous experiences that she liked or did not like, and this helped her make better decisions in choosing a college and a job after graduation. She states, "This is so essential and critical in the journey to knowing yourself and reaching those few core decisions that are important to you and your life."<sup>8(p105)</sup> She recommends that you keep testing things and growing in order to figure out what is important to you. When you have self-knowledge, you can make lists of considerations specific to you and prioritize them based on your personality, characteristics, and values. Then, you can make the most thoughtful and valuable decision in the first step of your professional career. Dr. Pletz also commented, "When those core decisions are made, then new opportunities and experiences present themselves."<sup>8(p104)</sup> Considerations that are relevant to the choice of the first job include location, job functions, benefits, mentoring opportunities, and company culture; these should be examined in the context of your personal goals and life plan.

#### Location

For some people, location is the most important consideration for choosing a job. Living close to their family and friends may be more important than the best professional opportunity. Job location may be particularly important if the job applicant's spouse or significant other is unable to move. A particular climate or environment may also be a consideration. A study of the relationship between climate and happiness demonstrated that climatic variables are significant in determining level of happiness.<sup>9</sup> When people have their preferred climate or location, they feel happier and more satisfied with their life; this may lead to job satisfaction.

The number of job opportunities differs depending on location. The job concentration may count as a main consideration when graduates are applying for their first job, since the higher concentration of jobs means greater opportunity and better chances of broadening their choices and having options. According to statistics from the Bureau of Labor Statistics, California and Texas have more people employed as pharmacists than other states; however their location quotient, which is the ratio of the concentration by area of occupational employment to the national average concentration, is lower than in other states. The mean hourly wage in California is higher than other states, but the living expenses in California are also higher. West Virginia has the highest concentration of jobs and the highest location quotient, meaning that it has more job opportunities.<sup>2</sup>

### **Job Duties**

To work every day and be successful, your job duties should match your professional interests and passion. You should be able to apply the knowledge, skills, and experiences that you have learned throughout your school courses and training. You will be spending most of your time on the job; if the job duties do not sound interesting when you read through the job description, that job may not be right choice for you. If your first impressions of the job are positive, you may be motivated to excel as a professional. If they are negative, you may have uncertainty about the future of your career. In the big picture, there are basically 2 types of pharmacist jobs: those that have patient interaction and those that have no patient interaction. Every pharmacy job is patient-centered, but you should think about the specific duties of the job and determine your preference.

### **Benefits**

When making a decision about a job, salary is a factor that cannot be ruled out. Among professional occupations, pharmacists have a higher annual median wage, which was estimated to be \$119,280 in 2013. In 2013, the annual wage of pharmacists in general merchandise stores (\$125,240) was higher than that of pharmacists in other settings. Wages in metropolitan areas are higher than in nonmetropolitan areas. For example, annual mean wages in certain metropolitan areas such as Gadsden, Alabama, and Santa Cruz-Watsonville, California, which are \$154,700 and \$151,270, respectively, exceed those of other areas by \$10,000 to \$20,000.<sup>2</sup>

In addition to salary, benefits can range from free parking to meal plans to retirement benefits. The value of benefits among different pharmacy companies ranges between \$3,000 and \$10,000 of annual mean wage. The perception of the value of benefits differs from person to person. In considering your first job, you need to determine what will be an acceptable offer for you.

### **Mentors**

A role model or mentor is very important as you make progress in your career. Some say that what you do in your first job is not as important as who you work for. He or she can give you opportunities for growth and guidance as you move up in your profession. As you evaluate your job offers, you should consider not only your immediate supervisor but also his or her boss. You will need to feel comfortable working with them and should be confident that they will provide you with opportunities for development.

### **Organizational Culture**

If you ask for career advice from people who have worked many years, they may talk to you first about company climate and culture. The relationships between people, including coworkers and supervisors, determine the image and overall workflow of the company. Within companies and organizations, teamwork plays a key role in producing better outcomes, and it also determines the corporate climate. It is difficult to judge what the climate is like before you work at the company, but you can get some sense from your on-site interviews or by asking other people who have experiences with the company.

### **Immigration Issues**

For international students who hold neither a green card nor US citizenship, there are additional considerations. Some international students may not be aware of the importance of getting a working visa. While they are in school, they hold an F1 visa, which is offered to students who are attending an academic program at a university in the United States. To work legally in the United States as a pharmacist, they will need to obtain an H-1B visa; this visa is becoming harder to obtain. Current immigration law allows 65,000 new H-1B visas for foreign workers in professional or specialty occupations; however, the visa is subject to annual numerical limits by the US government. International students cannot apply for an H-1B visa individually. They need a petition from

an employer, and it is seldom provided by industries in smaller settings.<sup>10</sup> Because the process of applying for the visa and obtaining the visa is becoming more complicated and competitive, students need to be aware of the availability of visas and the industry's sponsorship of the working visa. It is always a good idea to find someone who has already gone through the process and ask for his or her advice. There may only be a few jobs, out of many opportunities, that are available for these international graduates. Also some jobs may enable the pharmacist to apply for a green card in few years.

**Table 1** summarizes the various factors to consider in looking for your first job. Depending on your plans and your self-assessment of your personal and professional aspirations, certain elements may be more important than others. We believe that selecting the best mentor is the most critical aspect to a first job; finding the right mentor can shape career development for years to come.

### REAL-WORLD ADVICE ON YOUR FIRST JOB

To identify some of the common pitfalls in choosing a first job and to get advice from experienced professionals who have found the right first job, we conducted an informal survey that asked the following questions: (1) What was your first full-time job out of education/training? (2) How did you choose your first job? (3) How did your first job impact your current career? (4) What would you

have done differently? The respondents are from a variety of professions.

### Lessons from Experience

Professional school graduates such as pharmacists and physicians have a better idea of their future job, because they have already specialized and honed their interest by going through the rigors of education and getting a professional license. In addition, residency programs are offered in many different locations, and even some outside of the United States; this provides a wide variety of opportunities for graduating health care professionals. Well-established master's degree programs, such as the Master's in Health Care Administration, Health Science, and Public Health, are available, as are fellowships through various organizations and pharmaceutical companies.

Dr. Amanda Hafford, who is an assistant director of pharmacy at The Ohio State University Wexner Medical Center (OSUWMC), completed her residency and had experiences as a clinical pharmacist and staff pharmacist after graduating from her training. She commented that she would have continued her schooling for additional degrees had there been the opportunity. Dr. Hafford confirmed the strategy of learning about yourself fully as you make decisions about your first job.

Dr. Lina Scrocca, a clinical generalist pharmacist at OSUWMC, had difficulties choosing her first job out of school and became a hospital pharmacist at the Southern Ohio Medical Center in Portsmouth, Ohio.

**Table 1.** Relevant factors to consider in looking for your first job

Consideration	Reasons	Benefit/Outcome
Location	-Living closer to family and friends -Level of happiness associated with preferred climate -Job concentration depending on location	-Feeling motivated and encouraged -Increased happiness -Higher levels of opportunity
Job duties	-Professional interest and passion -Engagement in the profession	-Daily accomplishment -Good first impression of job and motivation to continue professional development
Benefits	-Salary -Other benefits	-Higher annual wage -Personally acceptable offer
Mentors	-Meeting your first role model	-Opportunities for growth and career guidance
Organizational culture	-Relationships with coworkers and supervisors -Overall workflow	-Better teamwork and membership -Better work productivity
Immigration issues	-Working visa (H-1B)	-Legally working and gaining the opportunity to apply for a green card later

As a pharmacy student, her APPE rotation in a hospital changed her views and directed her to health-system pharmacy as a career choice. Her first couple of years were challenging, because there was a great deal to be learned. She worked at the organization for 9 years. She emphasized the importance of mentoring and the interactions with professional colleagues in the first job by saying, "I was surrounded by praiseworthy role models such as physicians, nurses, pharmacy technicians, fellow pharmacists, and supervisors from whom I learned about many the aspects of healthcare. Understanding the perspective of other members of the healthcare team helped me become a better pharmacist." The important lesson she offers is that when you always do your best in the position you are in, you are inspired and you become an inspiring role model to others. In the end, her advice to pharmacy students is to seek a broader variety of experiences during the rotation year, which could provide eye-opening opportunities for their future career.

Physicians, who have more years of training after getting licensed, may have a different view of their first job. Dr. Daniel So, a director of the endocrine section at Good Shepherd Hospital and a partner at the Suburban Endocrinology & Diabetes Center in Illinois, chose his first full-time job as an endocrinologist at REA (Renal-Endocrine Associates) while he was looking for a clinically strong position that offered teaching opportunities. A recommendation from one of his mentors influenced him greatly in choosing his first job. He advises that you and your classmates are now at the same level in learning process. But when you start your new job, you will be working with colleagues of different experience levels and backgrounds – some with as much as 20 or 30 years' experience. They can teach you some valuable lessons, such as how to manage your patient load along with balancing a career and marriage life. Dr. So also commented that your first job teaches you that the responsibility for patient care rests with you now. He believes his first job continues to greatly influence his current attitude: "Your first job shapes how you think, work with patients, and interact with your colleagues. It is like having a good home education before you go out into the real world."

College graduates who decide to step into the real world after their undergraduate education have many job options, but these numerous possibilities can cause more confusion than anything else. Dr. Barbara Fishel, who is the dean of studies and director of research at the Hockaday School in Dallas, Texas, claims that she was not ready to do anything specific after graduating

from college and did not have a firm direction. At the same time, she did not have much time to think carefully about her future career because she needed to earn a living. She moved in with a friend in Ann Arbor, Michigan, and decided to try to get a job at the University of Michigan medical school based on her background in natural sciences. She looked for job openings in the university newspaper and got her first job as a biochemistry laboratory technician, which turned out to have a huge impact on her life. Through her unexpected first job, she discovered her aptitude for lab work and became fascinated with research. She also was very fortunate to meet a mentor, her first boss, who was patient and willing to invest the time to train her. She loved her job and, after 2.5 years as a technician, she decided to go to graduate school to pursue a doctorate in cell biology at Johns Hopkins University. Dr. Fishel regrets that she closed a lot of other options in her life and missed out on a more "normal" lifestyle by spending so much of her time in the lab and narrowing her focus so much in the early years. On the other hand, she recognizes that this allowed her to become good at what she was doing then and better at what she is doing now. She has been at the Hockaday School as a science teacher since 1998. She is a recognized and respected high school teacher who is willing to devote her time to her students' education and personal development, just like her mentor at her first job. She commented, "I would perhaps have chosen a more specific major in college, but in the end, I learned a lot by not being able to decide!"

Mr. Chris Capizzi is a graduate assistant in the PhD program for jazz studies at the University of Pittsburgh and an artist lecturer in jazz piano at Carnegie Mellon University (CMU). After graduating from CMU, he decided to pursue a job as a teacher. About a year after graduation, he saw a full-time university job as an accompanist in the newspaper. Although it was not the teaching job he had been looking for, it was full-time, provided benefits, and was still within academia, so he gladly took the job and worked there for 6 years. Through his first job, he was able to reevaluate his dream within an academic setting. This helped him succeed in a university career when he started teaching jazz piano at CMU. A few years of experience in academia led him to his decision to study for a doctorate in jazz studies and work toward a professorship at a university. When he was asked about what he would have done differently at his first job, he said, "Knowing the job was not what I envisioned myself doing down the road, I should have continued



to develop my career goals instead of putting them on hold until it was necessary to make a career change. I know I could have done a better job of anticipating unfavorable professional situations and events.”

Dr. Margaret Teaford is an associate clinical professor at the School of Health and Rehabilitation Sciences at The Ohio State University. After receiving her master's degree from the University of Wisconsin, her first full-time job was as a housing specialist for a nonprofit agency in Cleveland, Ohio. Because her cousin was living in Cleveland and she had connections to people in the area through her previous summer internship in Cleveland with a different agency, she thought Cleveland was a good location for her first job. The job was in an area of interest that had a newly appointed official, Mayor Stokes. She was responsible for working with community groups on housing problems in the city; in fact, she has maintained her interest in housing throughout her career, even at her current work. However, her first job only lasted for about 7 months, because the director who had hired her was dismissed by the board and the

office re-organized their mission and staffing. She was able to seize another opportunity in Cleveland, this time working for the agency where she had served as a summer intern. Looking back, she stated, “If I had to do it again, I would have learned more about the non-profit world, and would have been more wary of such a small organization with limited funding. I think I could have learned more and had a more solid work experience in another position rather than trying to figure out what to do (I had little or no supervision), and how to avoid inter-office politics. Again, I was able, however, to move to another job easily primarily because I had the contacts in the community.”

Despite being from different fields, these 6 people emphasize the importance of their first jobs. They realize how critical it is to have good mentorship from supervisors and bosses, to build strong relationships with coworkers and colleagues, and to establish a fit with the institution's organizational culture and politics. Your first job becomes one of the cornerstones of your life, and it can be the guide according to which you establish life plan and career goal. **Table 2**

**Table 2.** Lessons about first jobs from seasoned professionals in a variety of careers

Respondent current positions	First job	Specific considerations in choosing first job	Impact of first job on current career	Things you would have done differently
Assistant director of pharmacy	Clinical pharmacist/ staff pharmacist	Job duties, organizational culture, mentors/ supervisors	Confirmation of career path	Completed a fellowship, if there had been such a thing
Staff pharmacist	Staff pharmacist	Job duties	Discovery of career path	Broadened education experience as much as possible
Endocrinologist	Endocrinologist	Job duties, mentors/ supervisors	Shaped outlook and attitude towards other professional	Nothing
High school teacher	Biochemistry technician	Location, job availability, and relation to college major	Development of mentor relationship	Discovered more outside of work
Lecturer in jazz piano/ PhD student in jazz studies	University accompanist	Job availability and relation with career goal	Offered an opportunity to see academia from the inside without high stakes	Focused more on long-term goals
Associate Professor	Housing specialist for a non-profit agency	Location and network with people	Awareness of the need for a supportive community	Selected a first position more carefully for possible mentors and strength of organization

summarizes their views toward their first job – and emphasizes that no matter what the profession or trade, the first job is critical to future career success.

## CONCLUSION

The first job you take after your education/training will place you on a career trajectory that you will follow for some time. If you keep this guidance in your mind when making decisions about your first job, it will help you land a job that meets your ultimate goals and sets you on track to develop a career focused on providing patient-centered pharmacy services.

The most important tasks in your search are to know yourself, establish a list of considerations specific to you, prioritize them, and make the best decision you can in your current situation. Do not feel hurried in making this decision. Give yourself time to think about your core values. Although it is important to select your first job with a thought about your future, focus first on your current situation. Do not overthink your decision or worry too much about things not in the present moment. After you make your decision, be ready to learn and grow. Your first job will give you opportunity to organize your thinking and to discover your real strengths and weaknesses. Just do your best where you are with the tools that are available.

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