

Best Careers 2009: Pharmacist

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Overview. With patient access to [physicians](#) getting costlier and more scarce, pharmacists are stepping into the role of caregiver. They spend less time filling prescriptions (now largely delegated to assistants) and more time on the front lines: teaching diabetic [patients](#) how to inject insulin, helping hypertension patients manage their blood pressure, dispensing advice on which over-the-counter medication to use. One of a pharmacist's most important jobs is ensuring that patients can safely take multiple drugs together—interactions can be deadly.

The jobs aren't all at the local drugstore. One fourth of pharmacists work in [hospitals](#). Others work for pharmaceutical companies on new drug development—for example, in pharmacogenomics, custom designing drugs to work with an individual's genome. Just as cutting edge, if scarier: Pharmacists will also be key players in conducting mass immunizations and treatments in response to epidemics and bioterrorism.

Good news and bad news on the job market: The good news is that current demand is strong and that more pharmacy schools are opening, which will make it easier for you to get in. The bad news is that those new schools will be pumping out lots of new graduates, which will make it harder to land a job.

A Day in the Life. As a hospital pharmacist, you start your day as part of a team doing rounds, advising doctors, nurses, and patients about various drugs, especially side effects and interaction risks when combined with other drugs. Next, it's on to the hospital pharmacy, where you fill physicians' orders for intravenous and other prescriptions. Your top priority is to monitor patient records for potential side effects and unwanted interactions with other drugs. You also counsel patients about to be discharged, explaining how to take medications, watch for side effects, and use durable [medical devices](#) such as wheelchairs and breathing aids.

Smart Specialty

Research pharmacist. Drug research teams working on new medications for cancer, depression, and other diseases often include a pharmacist, to assist in understanding compounds' effects on the body. Unlike retail and hospital pharmacists, research pharmacists rarely need to work nights or weekends. Plus, you're involved in the important work of creating new drugs.

Salary Data

Median (with eight years in the field): \$103,000

25th to 75th percentile (with eight or more years of experience): \$93,300-\$118,000

(Data provided by [PayScale.com](#))

Training

Two or three years of undergraduate education plus a four-year doctor of pharmacy degree are required.

[The American Association of Colleges of Pharmacy](#) publishes links to all accredited pharmacy schools.

[U.S. News rankings](#) of pharmacy schools

Learn More

- [Department of Labor profile: Pharmacists](#)
- [American Association of Colleges of Pharmacy](#)
- [American Society of Health-System Pharmacists](#) (includes hospital pharmacy)
- [Pharmacy](#) by William Kelly

<http://www.usnews.com/money/careers/articles/2008/12/11/best-careers-2009-pharmacist.html>