

# PURSuing AN INDUSTRY FELLOWSHIP 4.0

## Applying for Post-PharmD Fellowships

### PREFACE

There are about 20,000 PharmDs working in the US-based pharmaceutical industry, and career opportunities for industry pharmacists have never been better. Correspondingly, Fellowship programs for PharmDs continue to expand. Today nearly 900 PharmDs participate in these programs at 100+ different sponsors, and there are over 4,000 fellowship program alumni working in the pharmaceutical industry. The growth, appeal, and value of these programs has become very clear.

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.” We need to be mindful that a relatively small percentage 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, 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 often require prior experience and/or skill sets 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 thousands of 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 Sanofi, 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.

Despite the exponential growth of fellowship programs, the application process remains very competitive. More students than ever are seeking alternatives to traditional pharmacy practice roles and they are highly attracted to the promise that these fellowship programs offer. Today, about 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, secure hard-to-find experiential opportunities, and develop strategies that can i) meet the basics expected of fellowship applicants and ii) help them stand out among the crowd of talented, qualified candidates.

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 expenditures for a full-time manager role! Until recently, fellowship sponsors have been collectively spending well over \$1 million annually to recruit fellows at the ASHP Midyear meeting. This level of expenditure may be unsustainable, so in the future the fellowship application process could more closely resemble the basic process that employers use to recruit most full-time employees. The pandemic likely accelerated this change, as Fellowship employers discovered that virtual recruiting practices deliver the same high-quality fellows --- but at a fraction of the expense! Many fellowship employers skipped the ASHP Midyear meeting altogether and filled their positions prior to the Midyear meeting.

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Virtual interviews have become the norm, particularly for earlier round interviews. It remains to be seen whether or not the final stages of the recruiting process will be in-person, either via onsite interviews or at a central location such as a professional meeting. With the uncertainty around this evolving process in the post-COVID era, you need all the help you can get to prepare for an increasingly complex 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 demystifies the fellowship program enterprise and provides the help and advice that student pharmacists need to become competitive candidates for these programs. We provide detailed suggestions for you that range from strategies to follow 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 Le, an accomplished PharmD graduate who successfully navigated this complex process, 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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