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## Preparation

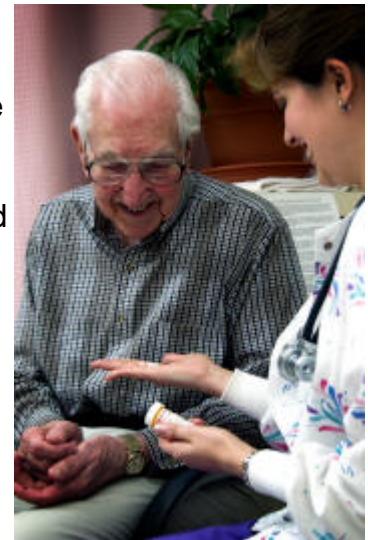
Most pharmacy technicians are trained on-the-job, but employers favor applicants who have formal training, certification, or previous experience. Strong customer service skills also are important. Pharmacy technicians may become supervisors, may move into specialty positions or into sales, or may become pharmacists.



Although most pharmacy technicians receive informal on-the-job training, employers favor those who have completed formal training and certification. Employers who have insufficient resources to give on-the-job training often seek formally educated pharmacy technicians. Formal education programs and certification emphasize the technician's interest in and dedication to the work. In addition to the military, some hospitals, proprietary schools, vocational or technical colleges, and community colleges offer formal education programs.

Accreditation of pharmacy technician programs is managed by the American Society of Health-System Pharmacists. There are currently 140 accredited programs (<http://accred.ashp.org/aps/pages/directory/technicianProgramDirectory.aspx>) throughout the United States. Formal pharmacy technician education programs require classroom and laboratory work in a variety of areas, including medical and pharmaceutical terminology, pharmaceutical calculations, pharmacy recordkeeping, pharmaceutical techniques, and pharmacy law and ethics. Technicians also are required to learn medication names, actions, uses, and doses. Many training programs include internships, in which students gain hands-on experience in actual pharmacies. After completion, students receive a diploma, a certificate, or an associate's degree, depending on the program.

Prospective pharmacy technicians with experience working as an aide in a community pharmacy or volunteering in a hospital may have an advantage. Employers also prefer applicants with experience managing inventories, counting tablets, measuring dosages, and using computers. In addition, a background in chemistry, English, and health education may be beneficial.



Two organizations, the Pharmacy Technician Certification Board and the Institute for the Certification of Pharmacy Technicians, administer national certification examinations. Certification is voluntary in most States, but is required by some States and employers. Some technicians are hired without formal training, but under the condition that they obtain certification within a specified period of time. To be eligible for either exam, candidates must have a high school diploma or GED, no felony convictions of any kind within 5 years of applying, and no drug or pharmacy related felony convictions at any point. Employers, often pharmacists, know that individuals who pass the exam have a standardized body of knowledge and skills. Many employers also will reimburse the costs of the exam.

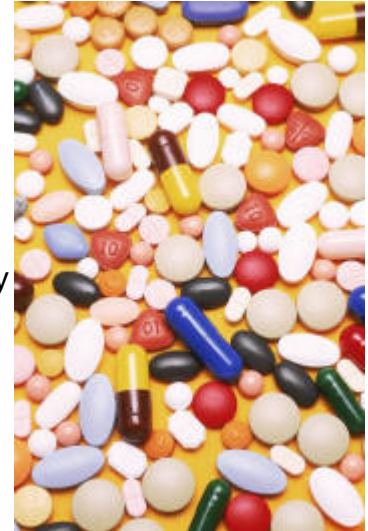
### "Pharmacy Technician Overview"

Prepared as part of the Sloan Career Cornerstone Center ([www.careercornerstone.org](http://www.careercornerstone.org))

Note: Some resources in this section are provided by the US Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Under both programs, technicians must be recertified every 2 years. Recertification requires 20 hours of continuing education within the 2-year certification period. At least 1 hour must be in pharmacy law. Continuing education hours can be earned from several different sources, including colleges, pharmacy associations, and pharmacy technician training programs. Up to 10 hours of continuing education can be earned on the job under the direct supervision and instruction of a pharmacist.

Strong customer service and teamwork skills are needed because pharmacy technicians interact with patients, coworkers, and health care professionals. Mathematics, spelling, and reading skills also are important. Successful pharmacy technicians are alert, observant, organized, dedicated, and responsible. They should be willing and able to take directions, but be able to work independently without constant instruction. They must be precise; details are sometimes a matter of life and death. Candidates interested in becoming pharmacy technicians cannot have prior records of drug or substance abuse. In large pharmacies and health-systems, pharmacy technicians with significant training, experience and certification can be promoted to supervisory positions, mentoring and training pharmacy technicians with less experience. Some may advance into specialty positions such as chemo therapy technician and nuclear pharmacy technician. Others move into sales. With a substantial amount of formal training, some pharmacy technicians go on to become Pharmacists.



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## Day in the Life

Pharmacy technicians work in clean, organized, well-lighted, and well-ventilated areas. Most of their workday is spent on their feet. They may be required to lift heavy boxes or to use stepladders to retrieve supplies from high shelves. Technicians work the same hours that Pharmacists work. These may include evenings, nights, weekends, and holidays, particularly in facilities that are open 24 hours a day such as hospitals and some retail pharmacies. As their seniority increases, technicians often acquire increased control over the hours they work. There are many opportunities for part-time work in both retail and hospital settings.



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## Earnings

According to the U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, median hourly earnings of wage-and-salary pharmacy technicians is about \$12.32. The middle 50 percent earn between \$10.10 and \$14.92. The lowest 10 percent earn less than \$8.56, and the highest 10 percent earn more than \$17.65. Median hourly earnings in the industries employing the largest numbers of pharmacy technicians are:



General medical and surgical hospitals	\$13.86
Grocery stores	\$12.78
Pharmacies and drug stores	\$11.50

Certified technicians may earn more. Shift differentials for working evenings or weekends also can increase earnings. Some technicians belong to unions representing hospital or grocery store workers.

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## Employment

Pharmacy technicians hold about 285,000 jobs in the United States. About 71 percent of jobs are in retail pharmacies, either independently owned or part of a drugstore chain, grocery store, department store, or mass retailer. About 18 percent of jobs are in hospitals and a small proportion was in mail-order and Internet pharmacies, offices of physicians, pharmaceutical wholesalers, and the Federal Government.

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## Career Path Forecast

Employment of pharmacy technicians is expected to increase by 32 percent from 2006 to 2016, which is much faster than the average for all occupations. The increased number of middle-aged and elderly people -- who use more prescription drugs than younger people -- will spur demand for technicians throughout the projection period. In addition, as scientific advances bring treatments for an increasing number of conditions, more pharmacy technicians will be needed to fill a growing number of prescriptions.



As cost-conscious insurers begin to use pharmacies as patient-care centers, pharmacy technicians will assume responsibility for some of the more routine tasks previously performed by Pharmacists. In addition, they will adopt some of the administrative duties that were previously performed by pharmacy aides, such as answering phones and stocking shelves.

Reducing the need for pharmacy technicians to some degree, however, will be the growing use of drug dispensing machines. These machines increase productivity by completing some of the pharmacy technician's duties, namely counting pills and placing them into prescription

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containers. These machines are only used for the most common medications, however, and their effect on employment should be minimal.

Almost all states have legislated the maximum number of technicians who can safely work under a pharmacist at one time. Changes in these laws could directly affect employment. Good job opportunities are expected for full-time and part-time work, especially for technicians with formal training or previous experience. Job openings for pharmacy technicians will result from employment growth, and from the need to replace workers who transfer to other occupations or leave the labor force.

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## Professional Organizations

Professional societies provide an excellent means of keeping current and in touch with other professionals in the field. These groups can play a key role in your development and keep you abreast of what is happening in your field. Associations promote the interests of their members and provide a network of contacts that can help you find jobs and move your career forward. They can offer a variety of services including job referral services, continuing education courses, insurance, travel benefits, periodicals, and meeting and conference opportunities. The following is a partial list of professional associations serving pharmacy technicians.



- ▶ **American Society of Health-System Pharmacists ([www.ashp.org](http://www.ashp.org))**
- ▶ **National Pharmacy Technician Association ([www.pharmacytechnician.org](http://www.pharmacytechnician.org))**
- ▶ **Pharmacy Technician Educators Council (<http://rxptec.org>)**

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