

# THE EVOLVING ROLE OF THE PHARMACIST AND WHY YOU SHOULD BE ONE



Traditionally, pharmacists have dispensed medications and filled/refilled doctor's prescriptions. However with advances in pharmaceuticals, pharmacists have become more involved with physician prescribing behaviours and practices today than ever before. Pharmacists now frequently modify doctors' prescriptions or even prescribe medications, review medications for safety and efficacy, educate the public on new medications on the market, and even investigate drug interactions and side effects. Advances in technology have allowed the pharmacist to perform laboratory tests, such as haemoglobin levels, and lipid profiles so they can give objective

readings to patients to see how they are doing and suggest optimal drug therapy.

Specifically, Alberta pharmacists are now able to prescribe schedule 1 drugs, excluding benzodiazepines and narcotics, as well as administer some injections as per the 2006 Pharmacy and Drug Act. Because of Alberta's vast geographic area and rural nature, the pharmacist's increased role has allowed greater access of health services in remote areas where access to doctors is usually limited. Improved access can also be seen with chronic disease management in clinical or hospital settings. Although the Alberta pharmacist's focus is changing, the pharmacist remains an expert in the application and usage of pharmaceuticals.

## ***Why become a pharmacist?***

In my opinion, pharmacists work to live, meaning that their work gives them the financial assistance and the free time to carry out other life goals. They go into work and they come home not worrying about work. There is also the opportunity to own your own pharmacy and be your own boss. Also, most people who I have talked to do respect and think highly of their pharmacist. Being a pharmacist also allows you to work in any area that people live, so in a big urban centre to the smallest village. There is a need for pharmacists everywhere, so getting a job is eminent.



### **Interested?**

There are a few pharmacy schools in Canada; the only pharmacy school in Alberta is at the University of Alberta. There are several courses which one must compete to become a pharmacist; all are listed on the pharmacy admissions website. Most students will usually complete the listed courses within the first two years of their undergraduate degree, but it is possible to complete the courses in only one year. And of course one must complete these courses with a high academic standing, above a 3.5 average GPA is considered to be a competitive average. However, if you happen to party too much in first and second year and your GPA is not above 3.5, do not worry. If you complete more than two years of university the admissions committee will weight your performance during your last two years of study. The only other documentation that you need to submit is the letter of intent, which outlines your understanding of the profession, your volunteer and work experience, and usually an ethical question. The letter should be very detailed description yourself and should demonstrate that you are a rounded personable individual who excels in activities outside of school. There is no interview and no admission test to write, which makes the U of A application process that much less stressful. Check out the Faculty of Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical sciences website site @ <http://www.pharm.ualberta.ca>, and see where it may take you!

Patrick Jones

*BSc (Specialization) Ecology and Pharmacy first-year student*

