

# How to Find Your Niche in Pharmacy

*Developed by Members of the 2022-2023 NPF Career and Leadership Development Advisory Group*

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## INTRODUCTION

Questions about finding your niche in pharmacy were posted on ASHP Connect for individuals to respond and provide their experiences, which produced a total of seven respondents. A survey with the same questions was also sent to members of the 2022-2023 ASHP Section of Clinical Specialists and Scientists Clinical Leadership Section Advisory Group for additional advice, which produced a total of ten respondents. The individuals who responded varied in area of practice, years of experience, and interests. Four themes were observed throughout the responses: gaining information, finding your interest, work-life balance, and finding your niche.

## GAINING INFORMATION AND EXPERIENCE

Among pharmacists surveyed, gaining information and experience was a key component of finding your pharmacy practice niche. Gaining information and experience means openness to involvement, communication, and self-learning. Pharmacists who have found their niche did so through seeking out shadowing opportunities inside their workplace or through volunteer opportunities in the community, at the workplace, or in professional organizations. Often, professional organizations offer the opportunity to apply for work groups with varying initiatives. These opportunities range from yearlong commitments to smaller, one-time volunteer opportunities and are an excellent way to gain more exposure to a particular pharmacy niche. More generally, being open to opportunities or even asking for opportunities despite being unsure if you will like them can aid in providing experiences and insight to different pharmacy niches. Regardless of your current position, taking on new projects or willingness to contribute to a project in an unfamiliar area will aid in learning new skills and increase exposure to other areas of pharmacy.

Additionally, gaining experience and information to find your niche may also involve communication with mentors and employers and networking. Survey respondents recommend keeping an open line of communication with employers which may create opportunity for movement within your workplace to new pharmacy niches. Likewise, utilizing mentors for career advice and professional networking will also benefit those seeking a change in their careers. Lastly, seeking out self-learning opportunities will assist in discovering your passion for specific areas in pharmacy. Attending professional meetings is beneficial as there are often a wide array of sessions that can help attendees learn about several areas of pharmacy. Professional meetings are also a great way to network and meet individuals who are well versed in a specific niche of pharmacy that may interest you. This provides a good opportunity to ask those individuals questions to learn about their career path or open a door to further opportunities within that field of pharmacy.

## FINDING YOUR INTEREST

There are multiple ways to evaluate types of interest within your career. First, consider the area of pharmacy that may provide the best fit. This could be ambulatory care, hospital, industry, academia, administration, or one of many others. Within these fields, significant overlap can exist, and interest may evolve throughout a single career. These areas of pharmacy also provide various opportunities for more specific interests and involvement. Pharmacists may expand their practice into clinical research, precepting, as well as committee, organizational, or residency leadership. A niche may be further defined by the distinct patient population it serves. One respondent described her professional interest in working with a multilingual practice, globally focused healthcare, and the underserved. Utilizing unique perspectives and considering interests from multiple angles encourages flexibility to grow into a job and maximizes interest in diverse ways. Occasionally, this may involve taking calculated risks. Some pharmacists can even help invent novel positions and roles for themselves based on strong interest and healthcare needs. An example of a novel role that has been created is a hepatic pharmacist in the ambulatory pharmacy setting. Being open to new possibilities and the idea of career development can lead to immense rewards and long-term career satisfaction.

When assessing your fit for different jobs, start with being honest about your skillset and the factors of a job that provide fulfillment. Consider the following questions when considering a new interest.

### When considering a new interest, ask yourself:



Would I find fulfillment in the tasks of the job?



Do I have the skills needed for this position?



Am I the best person to perform this job?



Does this position fit my idea of work-life balance?

One respondent advises his students that “no career decision should be considered a ‘life sentence’” and that changing your path does not constitute a betrayal of investment in the years committed to training. Learning about yourself in depth, professionally and personally, will provide more insight to know which opportunities are best to pursue and those which are best to let go. Striving for self-awareness will create higher clarity of your fit in a present job and your journey throughout a progressing career.

## WORK-LIFE BALANCE

Survey respondents offered multiple lines of advice when asked how to maintain a healthy work-life balance. Throughout, the sentiment of the survey responses seemed to be that pharmacists generally need to work on pairing back their commitments, which naturally tend toward over-commitment.

One prevailing theme in the responses was an advocacy for self-reflection to determine your priorities, strengths, and weaknesses. The result of this introspection is that you can set appropriate boundaries for taking on responsibilities. Important questions to consider include, to paraphrase some of the responses given: “Am I passionate about this project and invested in its success?”, “Do I have the right skill set to complete this project, or could it be handled better by someone else?”, and “Would I be accepting this project purely out of obligation?”. Respondents also emphasized that taking on a new responsibility always comes at the cost of some other opportunity. These considerations generally frame the issue of taking on responsibilities as a question of when to say yes, rather than when to say no.

The importance of relying on others, including mentors, coworkers, residents, and students, was another theme prevalent in the survey responses. Delegating and asking for help with the responsibilities of a project can both improve the quality of the end product and prevent personal burnout. In instances where you are not well-suited to take on a responsibility, respondents suggested helping to find the right person to take on that responsibility, instead of only declining the opportunity. Respondents emphasized the positive impact of self-care on both personal well-being and interpersonal professional relationships.

## FINDING YOUR NICHE

Among the respondents, there were differing opinions on how individuals truly find and change their niche, but many agreed open-mindedness and taking opportunities as they come along are crucial for finding the right path for you. Key points for finding your niche included that there is not a niche, your niche finds you, you go where the work is, and you must know your “why”.

Some respondents were skeptical of the ‘niche’ concept, instead emphasizing that one’s interests, needs, and skills can change over time. One respondent said, “I think every career is a journey, and I encourage everyone to be open minded and not close doors to opportunities, as you never know where you may end up.”

Multiple respondents encourage us to remember that your interests and needs can change over time, and your previous training can continue to lead you along your journey.

Another respondent stated that a niche could find you. This respondent stated, “People who took an interest in my professional growth were usually first to see potential in me, or a strength I should foster before I saw it in myself.” Seeking out mentors and discussing areas of interest can lead you to new opportunities.

One respondent discussed not being afraid to go where the work is. This can be interpreted in the sense of physical location or patient need. At times, a particular opportunity might not be available to you at your current work location, and you might have to take that next opportunity at a different location to gain experience and grow in new ways. There might also be times that there is a need in a new area you have interest in and taking on these needed opportunities can lead you to finding your passion.

The final central point for finding your niche was understanding your “why”. It is important to consider what brings you joy and why you are interested in a particular area or position. This can include the motivation for patient interaction, a specific patient population, interdisciplinary interactions, considering what challenges you, or what is overall best for your personal and work life. Your “why” is what continues to drive you forward in your career path, and it is important to keep this in mind when considering a particular area.

Finding your niche is unique to you, and each experience you gain can continue to help you reach your goals and needs. Your niche can change throughout your career, and it is more based upon the journey and your “why” at the given time.

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