Breaking into Specialty Pharmacy without a Residency

How students and early-career pharmacists can convert exposure, experience, and relationships into specialty pharmacy roles.

Disclaimer

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SESSION PRESENTERS

Meet the Presenter

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Learning Objectives

1. Describe why specialty pharmacy is expanding and how PharmD curriculum exposure is still developing
2. Map entry points into specialty pharmacy (e.g., med access, payer, pharma, community, fulfillment, clinical, call center, and remote roles)
3. How to convert rotations, internships, and networking into credible hiring evidence for a specialty pharmacy role
4. Tailor a CV/Resume and interview story to match what hiring managers actually screen for

Specialty pharmacy is NOT a niche anymore!

$294B

Estimated 2025 specialty pharmacy dispensed revenue across retail, mail, and health system SPs

+9.6%

Year-Over-Year dispensing growth increase over the revised 2024 estimate

1,900+

Specialty pharmacy accredited dispensing location in 2025

>5x the 2015 footprint!

51%

Specialty medications as a share of total prescription drug costs in 20.

75x

Average annual specialty patient drug cost vs. non-specialty patient cost.

Sources: Drug Channels Institute 2026. ASHP HSSP survey summary 2024.

PharmD curriculum is improving, but sill not IDEAL

37.7%

- Of student-reported curriculum offered a dedicated specialty pharmacy learning experience

72%

- Responding programs reported designated or primarily specialty APPE
  e

17%

- Have programs with a dedicated specialty pharmacy elective

Examples of schools with specialty pharmacy courses

- UIC-PMPR 442 Intro to Specialty Pharmacy
- Wisconsin-Professional elective covering marketplace, operations, reimbursement, accreditation
- Iowa-8511 Intro to Specialty Pharmacy: clinical, business, distribution, managed care
- Buffalo-PHM 612 Specialty Pharmacy elective
- Oregon State-APPE elective options in specialty pharmacy practice.

Sources: Fava et al. 2019; Patrick et al. 2026 abstract; public course/catalog pages for UIC, Wisconsin, Iowa, Buffalo, Oregon State, Union.

Entry into specialty pharmacy: adjacent experience counts

Community/retail

- Counseling, dispensing workflows, inventory, patient trust

Medication access

- PAs, appeals, copay support, benefit investigation, bridge therapy

Payer/PBM

- Formularies, UM criteria, network design, benefit strategy

Pharma/Hub

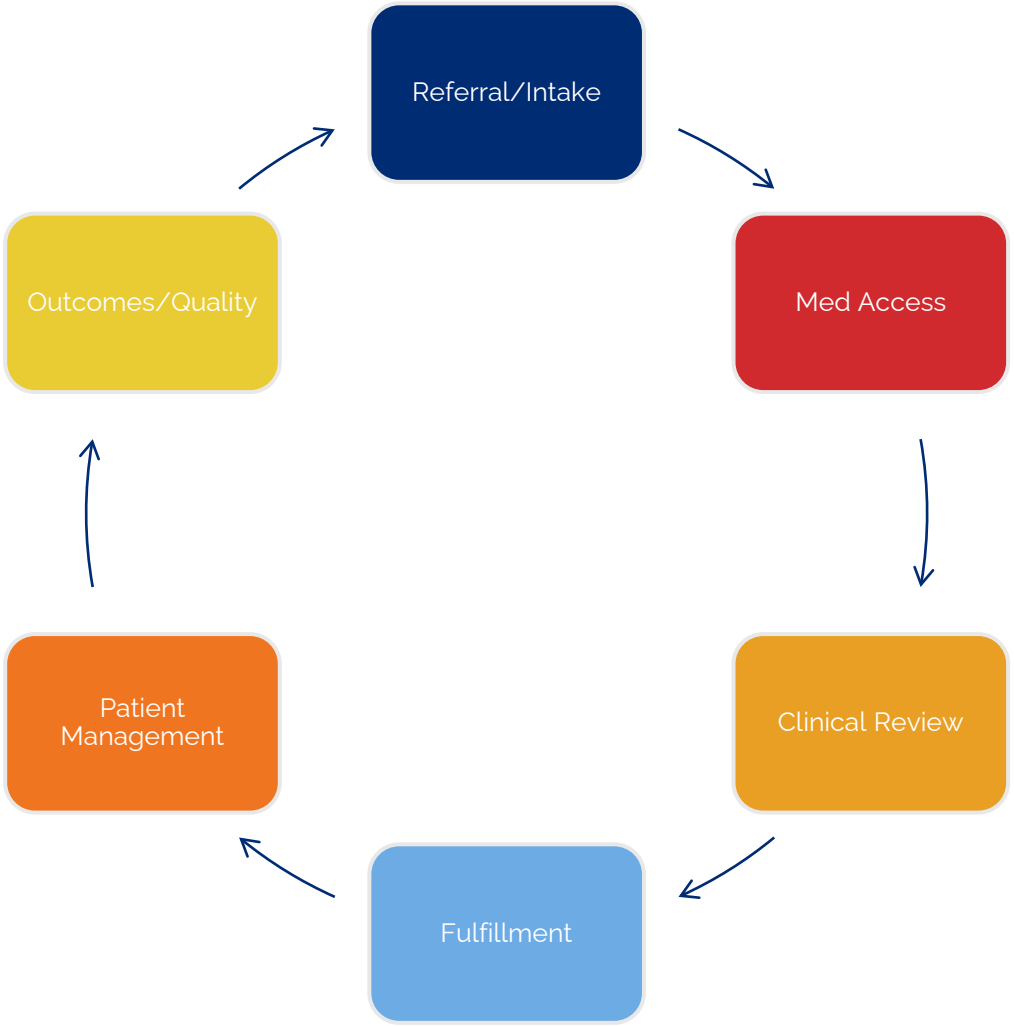
- Patient services, LDD channel, field reimbursement, REMS

Clinic Ambulatory

- Monitoring, adherence, collaborative care, therapy optimization

Role framing adapted from ASHP Specialty Pharmacy Career Resource Center.

Specialty pharmacy is an operating model, not a job title



1. **Fulfillment & dispensing pharmacists-**verification, cold-chain, REMS, clinical review
2. **Clinical pharmacists-**education, monitoring, adherence, side effect management, CPA/protocol work
3. **Med access pharmacists-**PA strategy, appeals, peer-to-peers, bridge program, benefit selection
4. **Call center pharmacists-**triage, outbound assessments, escalations, complex counseling
5. **Remote opportunities-**clinical outreach, PA/appeals, quality, outcomes, utilization management

Sources: ASHP Specialty Pharmacy Career Resource Center. NASP CSP exam-prep domains.

What each role is really hiring for

Dispensing	• Accuracy under pressure, competing priorities, cold chain, REMS, inventory management, leading people, clinical & product verification • **Interview proof: tell story + add metric + reflect on outcome**
Clinical	• Disease-state depth, patient education & ability to communicate, monitoring + adherence tactics, comfortable w/ solutions to complex patient journeys, accreditation knowledge • **Interview proof: tell story + add metric + reflect on outcome**
Med Access	• Benefits investigation, PA + appeal writing and templates, affordability, grants, foundations, copay cards, peer-to-peers • **Interview proof: tell story + add metric + reflect on outcome**
Call Center	• Triage + documentation, patient de-escalation, empathy, high volume patient communication, translating business of pharmacy into patient friendly language • **Interview proof: tell story + add metric + reflect on outcome**
Remote/Hybrid	• Self-management, need for measurable accountability, trust & transparency, documentation, team engagement in matrix environment • **Interview proof: tell story + add metric + reflect on outcome**

Role competencies synthesized from ASHP career descriptions and specialty pharmacy operational domains.

APPEs & Internships convert “interest” into evidence

Before

- Research the site, strategic plan, know access barriers, disease states, accreditation cycle (URAC, ACHC, etc.)

During

- Volunteer for the mess work (e.g., PAs, onboarding, reassessments) learn cold chain, understand the patient journey

After

- Ask for feedback regularly!! Used LinkedIn connections, update resume, and add concrete step to get to where you want to go

Pearls

- Have hired all interns and many APPE students -> These opportunities are a live interview!

Network for solutions and not simply to add contacts

1. Find the pain points

- Ask leaders what problem(s) keep them up at night and where they find the most difficulty staffing

2. Create visible proofs/solutions

- Turn pain point(s) into a small APPE/intern project, add to candidate portfolio, talk about what YOU did to address the opportunity

3. Ask for mentorship

- Ask "Who should I learn from?" Check-in with current contacts for suggestions. Don't be afraid to ask!

4. Follow-up

- 24h Thank You -> 2-week progress update -> on-going check-in -> share an outcome before asking for reference/referral

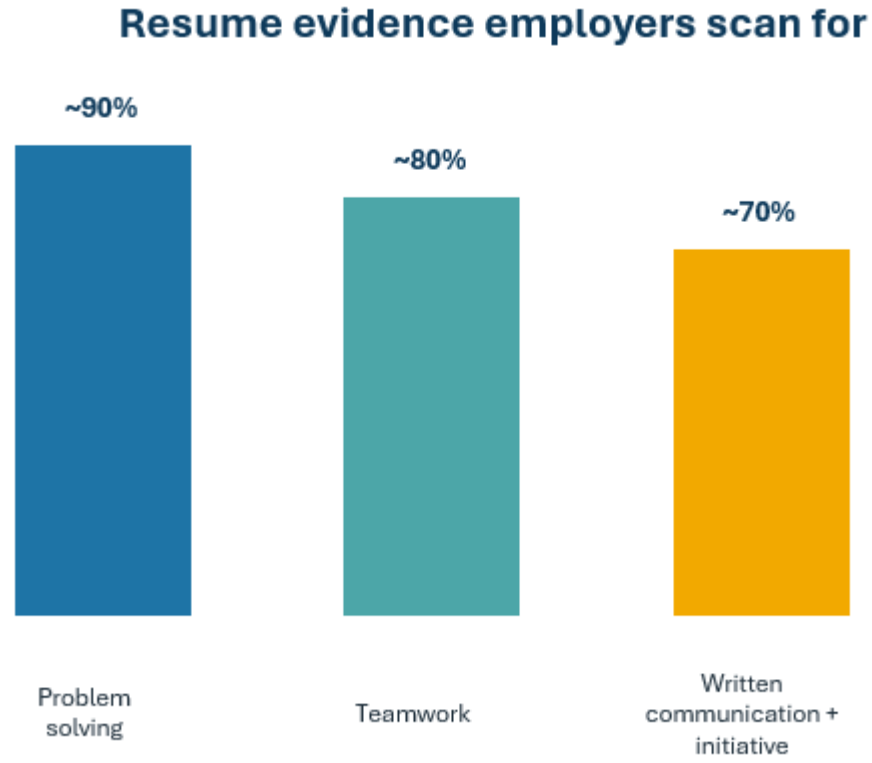
"What specialty pharmacy problem would you hire someone to solve tomorrow?"

Every conversation should create one next step!

TIPS for Success-Hiring signals & data driven insights

Common themes hiring-manager screens focus on

- **Communication-**ranked highest by pharmacy practice community
- **Professionalism-**reliable, coachable, patient-centered
- **Adaptability-**handles ambiguity, nimble, can pivot easily
- **Problem-solving-**nearly 90% of employers seek evidence of this within resume
- **Teamwork-**about 80% look for examples of this within resume/CV



Sources: Thompson et al., AJPE 2012; NACE Job Outlook 2025/2026 resume-skill surveys.

Tailor the CV-Translate tasks into specialty value

Specialty tailored

- Completed benefits investigation and PA documentation for complex therapies; identified missing labs and prevented avoidable delays.
- Educated patients on injectable therapy storage, administration, adverse effects, adherence, and when to escalate symptoms
- Prioritized high volume dispensing while maintain accuracy, patient communication, documentation and service levels.

Generic bullets

- Helped with prior authorizations
- Counseled patients on medications
- Worked in a busy pharmacy
- Able to problem solve

Real Life Reflection

- Marie's story from student to Specialty Pharmacist
  - It all started at NASP inSPire!!
  - No residency experience

Thank You

Questions? I’d love to continue the conversation.

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