

Opening Doors to Your Future Career in Pharma Industry and Medical Affairs



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You have completed a PharmD and have ample patient-facing experiences either in the community pharmacy or hospital pharmacy setting. However, you may have concluded that based on your experiences and skill set, the clinical side may not be the career path you wish to pursue. Naturally, you start looking at non-traditional career options and wonder where would be a good fit for me?

Non-traditional career options have become increasingly popular for PharmD graduates post-pandemic. When my graduating class cohort (University of Toronto class of 2021) posted a poll for our class, results demonstrated ~ 40% of graduating candidates were interested in careers in the industry. The good news is, the industry also seems to recruit PharmD graduates since their combination of clinical and scientific acumen along with their business acumen, seems to be appealing to the hiring team. This is specially the case for pharmacists who have spent time working in clinical settings (such as hospitals) as they have gained real-world clinical experience in a collaborative healthcare environment with physicians, nurses and other allied health members.

The question is, how can you as a PharmD graduate, pave your career path towards industry?

In the following paper, I wish to discuss the Pharmaceutical Industry 101 to cover the basics of career possibilities for PharmDs. Of course, much of what we discuss below also applies to MDs and PhDs. However, since as the author of this piece, I am a PharmD graduate, I wish to share my personal perspective and experiences.

In the healthcare world, the word “**industry**” encompasses more than just the pharmaceutical industry. In fact, medical device/technology (e.g., MedTech) companies (ranging from implants, capital equipment, or *in vitro* diagnostics), insurance companies (who work behind the scene to adjudicate prescription costs for patients), medical communications & marketing agencies (who help with drug and medicine advertising), specific solution providers (consultants who perform pharmacovigilance, safety or medical information tasks for various pharma companies), regulatory agencies (including those who perform pre-clearance services for drug advertising) and last, but not least, the pharmaceutical and bio/life science companies and manufacturers, all fall under the large umbrella of healthcare “industry”.

Within the **biopharmaceutical industry**, there are various departments and functions who all work together very collaboratively to ensure a molecule makes its way from the laboratory settings (often referred to as bench side) to the patients (often referred to as bedside). These departments (non-exhaustive list) include clinical development (R&D), regulatory affairs and compliance, health economics outcomes research (HEOR), market access, pharmacovigilance, medical information, sales and marketing and finally, medical affairs.

Within the **medical affairs** department, there are several roles including medical science liaison (MSL/Field Medical), medical advisors, associate directors, medical operations and excellence (just to name a few). The title of roles and departments vary largely based on the company’s size and business unit structures.

PharmD graduates often start looking directly into the MSL role as it seems like a natural fit. This is largely the case as PharmDs have both a solid foundational scientific knowledge on various therapeutic areas and also have clinical experience in patient-facing settings including community pharmacies and/or hospitals. In addition to that, pharmacists have training and aptitude for business as many pharmacists naturally own a pharmacy and run healthcare business operations. As such, to learn healthcare business in the larger industry setting, is an intuitive and natural shift in gear for pharmacists.

Although MSL role seems like a natural fit for PharmDs, it is important to note that many successful PharmDs also work in several other functions such as sales, marketing, regulatory, medical information and many other domains within pharma. Therefore, it is always a good idea to keep an open-mind when on the job hunt and be flexible to break into industry from any of the entry-level roles that may have been offered to you.



So now that we have a basic understanding of some possible job opportunities in pharma, what are some opportunities that graduates can tap into to help them break into industry?

Here is my short list:

- 1) **Internships** – abroad and locally
- 2) **Placements/rotations:** get involved, go above and beyond
- 3) **Residency/Fellowships/Co-op**
- 4) **Universities and Colleges** offering specialized programs related to industry
- 5) **Networking:** Go to conferences, attend virtual sessions, contact individuals on LinkedIn
- 6) **Mentorship**
- 7) **Professional Organization Membership**

Here is a key take away from this reading:

- 1) Maximize your chances of breaking into industry by being flexible and open-minded about roles
- 2) Do your research to understand the “why” you would like to join the healthcare industry
- 3) Explore opportunities that help you gain new skills, including fellowships and volunteer opportunities
- 4) Grow your network and get mentorship
- 5) Most importantly ... drum roll ... **Do not give up on your dreams!**

If you were able to get a terminal D degree, you are more than capable to land your dream career! I believe in you, and you should believe in yourself!

Do not give up!

How can Medical Affairs Professional Society (MAPS) help?

- **Resources**
 - **Content Hub e-learning:** <https://medicalaffairs.org/content-hub/> i.e. *An Introduction to Medical Affairs e-Learning Module*
 - **Webinars & podcasts :** <https://medicalaffairs.org/early-career-professionals-paths/>
 - **Career Resources:** <https://medicalaffairs.org/career-resources/>
- **Mentorship** – formal mentorship program for those with prior industry experience: <https://medicalaffairs.org/maps-connect/mentorship/>
- **Networking** – conferences, chapter meet-ups, connect with chapter leads
 - **Join us on LinkedIn:** <https://www.linkedin.com/company/medical-affairs-professional-society-maps-/>
 - **Join us on Instagram:** <https://www.instagram.com/mapsmedaffairs/>
 - **Join us on Twitter:** @MAPSmedaffairs
- **Collaboration with IPHO** – Internship opportunities
 - <https://medicalaffairs.org/maps-ipho/>

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About the Author:

Ghazaleh EA is a clinical pharmacist and pharmaceutical industry professional and is currently a Reviewer at the Pharmaceutical Advertising Advisory Board (PAAB).

Being passionate about Medical Affairs, she has contributed medical and scientific expertise to industry professionals through her first medical affairs role as an intern consultant at COMPASS Medical Affairs Consulting, and then as an Oncology Medical Affairs intern at Bayer. She currently serves as a lead of

a global initiative at Medical Affairs Professional Society (MAPS) to engage, empower and educate the new generation of Medical Affairs professionals. Ghazaleh continues to be actively involved in clinical pharmacy practice at the hospital where she has provided direct patient care in various clinical areas including oncology, cardiology, infectious diseases and internal medicine.

Ghazaleh has received her BSc. from the University of British Columbia and graduated with PharmD. from the University of Toronto.