Connie Elejalde: 10 Questions for a Successful Working Professional
(Pharmacy Student, Job Title: Pharmacy Intern Class of 2008, BS Biology)

1. Why did you decide to become a Pharmacist?
   I was always interested in doing something within the field of healthcare. With the help of my undergraduate advisor and after attending many information sessions, I decided to apply to pharmacy school. Becoming a pharmacist would better fit the lifestyle that I want as an adult, and a life of a physician was not too appealing to me.

2. What are the educational requirements to become a Pharmacist? Is an advanced degree or certification necessary or beneficial to gaining employment in your field?
   Yes- a bachelor’s degree is highly encouraged. There are several prerequisites that have to be completed, including one year of general biology, one year of general chemistry, one year of organic chemistry, biochemistry, human physiology, microbiology, and one year of physics, calculus, interpersonal communication, and psychology.
   Pharmacy school is a four-year program, three years didactic (classroom work) and one year of clinical experience (rotations). The degree is called a Doctor of Pharmacy (PharmD). This degree is necessary in order to be able to practice in a pharmacy.

3. What is a typical work day like for you? (i.e. job responsibilities)
   Currently as a student, my day is like typical graduate student’s day. We have class everyday Monday-Friday, from 8 or 9 am until 3 or 4 pm. As an intern, I work one evening shift and every third weekend. My job responsibilities as a pharmacy intern are to prepare medications (oral and intravenous), deliver the medication to the nurses, answer questions nurses have and become familiar with the workflow of a pharmacy. I work at Loma Linda University Medical Center inpatient satellite pharmacy.
   When I become a pharmacist, my job duties will be to enter physicians’ orders and answer clinical questions asked primarily by nurses and doctors. Pharmacists are also responsible for helping manage patients’ disease states, looking up drug interactions, and ensuring that their
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laboratory values are within acceptable ranges when it comes to the close monitoring that some medications require.

4. What do you like and dislike most about your job?
Currently as a student, I dislike how much time I have to set aside to study. I study after school, very late at night, and weekends. However, I do like how much more disciplined I have become. I have learned a lot about time management and personal balance. I like learning about all the drugs and disease states, and I especially like knowing how much of an impact a pharmacist can have on a patient. I also like all the people I work with, and my classmates are very helpful. Loma Linda really cares for their students, provides educational opportunities and stresses the importance of community service.

5. What kind of individual (in terms of talent and personality) would be best suited for your job, and why?
For someone to become a pharmacist you have to really like school. After 4-5 years spent working on a bachelor’s degree, you will spend another 4 years in pharmacy school. A person who chooses pharmacy work has to be personally driven and be able to self-motivate, because things are very stressful. At times, the material we are taught is very overwhelming. As a pharmacist, a person should have good interpersonal communication skills because a huge part of the job is educating patients and other healthcare providers about medications. A person should be able to clearly communicate and be confident that they can provide good service.

6. What kinds of jobs are available for someone entering into your field today?
So many I was not aware of!
Pharmacists can work in retail (i.e. Rite-Aid and Walgreens) or hospital pharmacies, where they specialize in different areas such as cardiology, pediatrics, or geriatrics. Pharmacists can also work for a mail-order pharmacy, independent pharmacy, or ambulatory care clinics.
7. What are some suggestions you could give to a student to give him/her an edge on the competition?
   Be well-rounded. Participate in community service activities, join clubs, spend time with family and study hard! It is not easy to do, but learn to be self-motivating and have friends who support you during this long journey. Do research, find a great mentor someone who knows what your needs and wants are and build a good relationship with them. I am thankful for having a wonderful advisor who prepared me for pharmacy work and continues to support me. You have to find balance. You cannot just be studying all the time and not make time for family, friends and your community.

8. What was your interview process like (i.e. one-on-one, panel), day long? What kinds of questions did they ask?
   My interview for pharmacy school was conducted by two faculty members. The interview itself was about 30 minutes, and they asked questions such as, “Why do you want to attend Loma Linda?” “Why are you interested in pharmacy work?” “What are your values?” I recommend visiting www.studentdoctor.net for more tips on writing applications and the field of pharmacy in general.

9. What is the pay scale like for your position and are there possibilities for advancement?
   The current starting average salary for a pharmacist is $130,000. Advancements are possible within administration as a pharmacy manager or district manager. Salaries may be higher for individuals with their own independent pharmacy.

10. Lastly, what is one piece of advice you could give to someone wanting to pursue a career in your field?
    Know that this will be a challenging journey. You will be tested emotionally, physically, mentally, and spiritually. Grow from these experiences and know that it is all worth it in the end. Do not do it for the money, though it is great incentive. You definitely earn that salary with all the work that comes with
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becoming and actually being a pharmacist. Just be well-rounded, find your balance, and learn time-management!