

# Pharmacy technicians factsheet

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Special thanks go to the Association of Pharmacy Technicians UK (APTUK) for their help with the production of this factsheet. For more information, see the [APTUK website](#).

## Pharmacy technicians factsheet

### Qualifying as a pharmacy technician

All pharmacy technicians must be registered with the GPhC in order to work. In order to register, technicians must complete a Level 3 Diploma in Pharmacy Service Skills (NVQ) (QCF) coupled with a Level 3 Diploma in Pharmaceutical Science (QCF).

The training consists of two diplomas which are gained separately: one diploma is for knowledge (the Level 3 Diploma in Pharmaceutical Science, QCF) and is college based, although some providers offer the option of completing the course via distance learning. The other diploma is gained through work experience and is competence based (the NVQ Level 3 in Pharmacy Service Skills). Trainees must follow a GPhC accredited/recognised course. For a full list of accredited courses, visit the GPhC [website](#). Trainees can do the college based/distance learning element even if they have not got a work placement in a pharmacy.

The mandatory work experience required to register as a pharmacy technician is 1260 hours over a two year period. A minimum of 315 hours of work experience under the supervision, direction or guidance of a pharmacist to whom the applicant is directly accountable must be undertaken in each of the two years. The duration in hours excludes sickness absence, maternity/paternity leave and holidays. For further information, see the GPhC [website](#).

### Code of conduct for pre-registration trainee pharmacy technicians

All pre-registration trainees are expected to abide by the GPhC's code of conduct. The code is a means of ensuring that all trainees understand and take responsibility for the work that they do. Trainees must be able to demonstrate that they are capable of working within the code and can conduct themselves in a professional manner at all times. For further details, see the GPhC [website](#).

### Funding for training

The NHS can provide funding for hospital pre-registration trainee pharmacy technicians. Funding may vary and is dependent on your local NHS. Some NHS trusts may also offer the chance to train through an apprenticeship for pharmacy technicians. For further information, see the NHS [website](#). Within community pharmacy, funding support varies with employers, and therefore requires confirmation before studying commences.

The *Education and learning* section of the government website gives general information and links to other sources of help on funding for further education, higher education or adult learning.

### Can a pharmacist register as a pharmacy technician?

Pharmacists will need to undergo all of the training as set out above in order to register as a pharmacy technician. For further information about the criteria, see the GPhC [website](#).

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## Registering as a pharmacy technician

Trainees can apply to join the register up to four weeks before completion of the relevant work-based experience. All applicants are obliged to complete a fitness to practice declaration. Applications take up to four weeks to process, however, if an applicant has disclosed a fitness to practice issue this process can take significantly longer. For full details on how to register and GPhC document requirements, see the GPhC [website](#).

## Registration fees

All pharmacy technicians have to pay an initial application and entry fee. Following on from this, pharmacy technicians are required to renew their registration annually. Failure to renew registration on time will result in temporary suspension from the register and additional charges for late payment. It is important to remember to budget for registration fees, as unregistered pharmacy technicians are not able to practice and will suffer from both salary loss and additional GPhC charges. For up-to-date details on registration fees, see the GPhC [website](#).

## Continuing Professional Development (CPD)

All pharmacy technicians are required by the GPhC to undertake training and/or development activities in order to keep up-to-date with advances in the field of pharmacy. At time of writing (August 2015), pharmacy technicians must record a minimum of nine CPD entries per year. Entries can be recorded on paper or on-line. CPDOnline is the GPhC's on-line system for recording entries, and there is now a CPDOnline version for tablets. For further information, see the GPhC [website](#).

Entries can be based on a range of activities, for example, training courses, work-based skill development and reading relevant to your field of practice. For further information, see the GPhC CPD [framework](#).

On average, the GPhC calls for an individual's CPD record once every five years. Ordinarily, you have six weeks to submit your CPD record for review from the date of the initial request. Pharmacy technicians who are unable to meet the deadline can request an extension, however, these are only given if you have mitigating circumstances. Failure to submit CPD records promptly can lead to removal from the register. People who are absent from work due to illness or maternity leave can request an exemption from submitting records for a specific period provided the absence is for twelve months or less. For further information, including the CPD Extension Request form, see the GPhC [website](#).

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### Continuing professional development assistance

There are lots of organisations that can provide additional resources/help with CPD. Here are some suggestions:

#### Association of Pharmacy Technicians UK (APTUK)

The APTUK is the professional leadership body for pharmacy technicians in the UK. It has compiled the Foundation Pharmacy Framework (FPF) to support the development of skills and services for pharmacy technicians. This is available to download on their website. You do not have to be a member to access this document, however, members can receive additional support with CPD from APTUK *champions* and have their CPD records reviewed prior to submission to the GPhC. APTUK *champions* are pharmacy technicians with more than 2 years' knowledge to help support early years pharmacy technicians. APTUK also have a network of local branches where CPD is delivered. For more information, see the APTUK website.

APTUK also hold an annual professional conference for pharmacy technicians that provides support for CPD. For further information about the conference, including details of master-classes and workshops, see the APTUK website.

#### Centre for Postgraduate Pharmacy Education (CPPE)

CPPE offer a range of learning programmes for pharmacy technicians. Formats include distance learning, e-learning, e-assessments and local workshops. For further details, see the CPPE website.

#### National Pharmacy Association (NPA)

The NPA offer a selection of courses including professional qualifications, clinical practice and business skills. For further information, see the NPA website.

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## Fitness to practice

All pharmacy technicians must complete a fitness to practice declaration with their annual registration renewal. Any criminal convictions or health matters must be reported using the GPhC *something to declare form* or the *something to declare health form*. Failure to comply with these rules could result in a fitness to practice investigation. For further information about reporting fitness to practice issues, including what to do if something changes during the year, see the GPhC [website](#).

## Fitness to practice investigations

A GPhC investigation can take time. However, the GPhC aim to notify pharmacy technicians of the outcome of an investigation within six months of receiving a concern. The GPhC also aim to provide case updates every three months. For further information, see the GPhC [website](#). In some cases the GPhC may issue an interim order pending the results of the investigation. This can involve an order imposing registration conditions or suspension.

Bear in mind that complex cases can take considerably longer to complete. Ordinarily, inspectors will gather evidence by speaking to any witnesses and the pharmacy technician under investigation, and they may also visit the registered pharmacy premises if applicable. This evidence is then considered using the GPhC's [threshold criteria](#) and only those cases judged as reaching the relevant threshold will be referred to the Investigating Committee for a full hearing.

Registrants who are involved in a fitness to practice investigation might want to seek legal advice. There are many solicitors who specialise in fitness to practice cases, and most are happy to offer an initial telephone consultation free of charge.

## Fitness to practice support

APTUK can provide support/additional training to pharmacy technicians members who are undergoing fitness to practice investigations. For further information, see the APTUK [website](#).

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## Self employment issues

### Working as a locum pharmacy technician

Locum pharmacy technicians are an integral part of the pharmaceutical workforce, and for some the attractions of being a locum pharmacy technician are clear. You can choose your own hours, you can decide where you would like to work and often the pay can be very good.

### Self-employed or employee

It is important to establish employment status at the very outset because employees and self-employed people are treated very differently under the UK employment laws. Ordinarily locums are classed as self-employed, meaning that they will be responsible for paying their own tax and national insurance (NI) contributions and keeping their accounts in order and up-to-date. The amount and type of NI contribution paid will depend on the amount of money earned.

Many of the basic employment rights that apply to employees in the UK do not apply to someone who is self-employed. For example: -

- statutory sick pay
- paid holidays
- paid maternity leave
- redundancy payment
- protection from unfair dismissal
- right to notice.

Self-employed workers are entitled to certain basic employment rights, examples include the right to take maternity leave (but not necessarily paid maternity leave) and the right to take rest breaks and holidays (again, not necessarily paid).

Agency workers who work for the same end user for more than 12 weeks can acquire rights to be treated comparably to other workers/employees. Examples include the ability to use child care schemes and comparable pay.

For further information about basic employment rights, see the government [website](#).

If you are a member of a trade union you can contact them for further clarification of your employment status. You could also contact an organisation such as the [Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service \(ACAS\)](#) or your local [Citizens Advice Bureau \(CAB\)](#) for further guidance.



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### Financial considerations

As locums do not have employment rights such as statutory sick pay and paid holidays, it is advisable to plan ahead for the unexpected, for example, illness, or for other events such as starting a family or holidays.

Also, as work is not guaranteed, it makes sense to prepare for periods of unemployment. If you are not working or your work is sporadic, you might want to seek advice.

The Money Advice Service (MAS) is a free government service providing budgeting and money-managing advice. For further information, see the [MAS website](#).

As self-employed people are not entitled to statutory sick pay, locums might want to consider getting financial protection to cover themselves in the event of illness, accidents or disability. Illness insurance can be a means of ensuring that you have an income in times like these.

### Illness insurance

There are many different types of illness insurance available. Many policies will only cover certain illnesses and many do not cover self-employed people. Ordinarily, there is a waiting time before payment begins, and some policies will only pay out for a limited time. You will need to check your policy carefully to make sure it is the right one for you. For further information on illness protection insurance, and the advantages and disadvantages, see the Adviceguide [website](#).

### Pensions

Self-employed people are entitled to the basic state pension as long as they have enough NI contributions or credits.

Given that locums often have earnings fluctuations due to irregular working patterns, come retirement time they may find that they do not have a full NI contribution record and this could affect the amount of state pension received.

If you are unsure of your entitlement, you can ask for a state pension estimate. You can call the Future Pension Centre on **0845 3000 168** or you can request a statement online via the government [website](#). This will tell you what you are likely to get when you retire.

If you have gaps in your NI contributions you might be able to pay voluntary contributions. This could help to increase your state pension on retirement. For full details of how to pay voluntary contributions, eligibility criteria for paying voluntary contributions and how to check your NI record see the government [website](#).

Many people find that the basic state pension is not enough to secure a comfortable retirement. An option is to take out and make payments into a personal pension plan. Any contributions made to a pension plan will be subject to income tax relief. For further information on income tax relief on pension contributions, see the HMRC [website](#).

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### The Pensions Advisory Service (TPAS)

TPAS is an independent organisation that provides free information about all types of pensions. For further information, see the TPAS [website](#).

### The Money Advice Service (MAS)

MAS is a free independent service. Their website has information about pensions and includes comparison tables for choosing an annuities provider and a pension calculator to help you work out how much pension you will need. For further information, see the MAS [website](#).

A financial adviser can help with planning for retirement. For guidance on how to go about finding a financial adviser and ensuring that they are properly qualified, see [Adviceguide](#).

## Tax

A person who starts self-employed or contracted work and is responsible for her/his own tax and/or NI contributions has a duty to notify the HMRC within three months of the start of that activity or s/he could be liable for a financial penalty. For further information, see Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC) [website](#).

### Tax returns

If you are self-employed, you will need to fill in a self-assessment tax return every year. You will be responsible for keeping accurate records so that you can fill in your tax return correctly. You can use an accountant to do this on your behalf if you wish.

The HMRC website has further guidance about filling in a self-assessment return and keeping the right records. You could also contact their Self-Employed Helpline for further basic information about self-assessment, NI payments and record keeping. The number is **0300 200 3504**, or see the government [website](#).

Adviceguide also offers information on who should complete a tax return and how to go about completing the forms. For further details, see the [website](#).

If you think that you will be unable to pay your tax bill on time, you should contact the HMRC right away. The HMRC's Business Payment Support Service Helpline number is **0300 200 3835**.

TaxAid is a charity that helps people on low incomes with their tax affairs. You can contact their national helpline on **0345 120 3779** or, for further information, visit the TaxAid [website](#).



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## Finding work

Locums may be contracted directly by an employer or may choose to join an agency. Some employers will only book locums via an agency.

Joining an agency can alleviate the stress of finding locum work. Locums can specify the hours they would like to work, the area and also the minimum rate of pay they will need.

There are numerous agencies for locum pharmacy technicians and it might be a good idea to have a look at a few before choosing. A personal recommendation is also helpful.

Points to consider when joining an agency include: -

- does the agency charge a placement fee
- how long is a typical wait between placements
- does the agency provide any benefits
- what is the rate of pay.

## Other employment issues

### Professional indemnity insurance (PI)

It is a GPhC requirement (*Standards of conduct, ethics and performance -standard 7.9*) to "make sure that all your work, or work that you are responsible for, is covered by appropriate professional indemnity cover". This insurance cover is designed to protect against claims made by a patient if mistakes are made or if a locum pharmacy technician is found to be negligent in some or all of the services they provide.

There are two main types of PI policies - *claims-made* and *occurrences*. With an occurrence policy any claim made after the policy has been terminated will still be covered as long as the person was insured at the time of the event.

With a claims-made policy, if you have allowed your policy to lapse by the time the claim is made, even if you were insured at the time of the event, you will not be covered. This is an important point to consider if you are going to take a career break and will be letting your insurance lapse.

Even if your employer's insurance covers you, it is worth bearing in mind that in the event of a conflict of interest between you and your employer, the insurance may actually provide cover for the employer rather than yourself.

If you are a member of a trade union/association check your membership benefits as in some instances full membership may provide you with standard insurance cover and related legal costs.

APTUK, in partnership with NPA, offers professional indemnity insurance to its members. For further information, see the APTUK [website](#).

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## Employment rights

As an employee, you will have employment rights, for example, having a right to be paid the minimum wage, right to holiday pay and the right to protection from discrimination. It is useful to know your rights to ensure fair treatment at work. For further information on your rights while working, see the [Citizens Advice Advice Guide](#). Your local Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) can provide free employment advice if you have a problem at work. For further information, including how to find your local bureau, see the [CAB website](#).

Alternatively, if you are a member of a trade union, you could contact them for further advice. You could also contact an organisation such as the [Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service \(ACAS\)](#).

## Discrimination law

All workers, whether they are employees or self-employed, have the right not to be unlawfully discriminated against. For further information see the [Citizens Advice Advice Guide](#) or visit the [government website](#).

## Careers advice

Many pharmacy technicians go on to develop further skills related to helping patients to manage their medicines. These include specialist roles such as checking and recording the medications that patients should be taking. For further information about career opportunities, see the [APTUK Career Leaflet](#).

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### Training to become a pharmacist

Some pharmacy technicians may want to further their career by training to be a pharmacist. Pharmacy technicians could consider a pharmacy foundation degree; this is a two year, full-time course, followed by three years on an MPharm degree course. Once completed, successful candidates can apply for an accredited MPharm degree and go directly into year two of the degree. However, completion of the foundation course does not guarantee students a place on an MPharm degree course. For further information, see the [GPhC website](#).

### Harold and Marjorie Moss Charitable Trust

The Harold and Marjorie Moss Charitable Trust provides financial grants to pharmacy technicians who are undertaking an MPharm degree to become a pharmacist and who find themselves in financial hardship. For further information, contact: [HMMCT@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:HMMCT@hotmail.co.uk)

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## Wellbeing

### Work/life balance

Like it or not work takes up a significant amount of your daily life so it's important to find that balance between giving it your undivided attention while you are there and drawing a line under it when you leave at the end of the day. Some useful tips on making that divide are: -

- make a list of anything that requires attention before you finish for the day and leave it at work to refer to the next day
- avoid checking emails at home
- use your journey home to think through the day and 'let go' of it
- set yourself enjoyable goals outside of the workplace.

Pharmacist Support has a range of fact sheets relating to health and well-being.

[Exercise fact sheet](#)

[Healthy eating fact sheet](#)

[Mindfulness fact sheet](#)

[Sleep fact sheet](#)

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## Stress

We all feel stressed from time to time, however, for some people the pressure they are facing in their daily life becomes too much. By understanding stress and how to recognise our own personal warning signs we can find ways in which to deal with stress to help lead happier and more fulfilling lives.

### Dealing with stress

#### 1) Take control

The act of taking control and finding a solution that specifically meets your needs is in itself empowering. Try to identify those things that you can control and concentrate on dealing with them.

#### 2) Prioritise and manage your time

If you are feeling overwhelmed and cannot see a solution, try listing all the things you need to do and then prioritise them. Is there anything you can remove from the list? Identify which ones you have to do yourself and whether you can ask someone else to take something on. For each task or problem, try brainstorming ways to tackle the first bit of the problem. Think about what advice you would give someone else or what advice they would give you. Write a plan with small, easy steps. Think about any obstacles that may get in the way and look at methods for combatting them. Focus on dealing with one chunk at a time and avoid the temptation to race ahead and try to solve everything at once. By breaking your problems down, they will feel much more manageable.

#### 3) Avoid unhealthy habits

Try not to rely on alcohol, smoking and caffeine as your ways of coping. Instead, try to maintain a healthy diet as what you eat can have a major impact on how you feel. For further information, see Pharmacist Support's [Healthy eating factsheet](#).

### Other resources to help with stress

#### The Mental Health Foundation

The Mental Health Foundation have some free well-being pod casts that you can download from their [website](#) and they also produce a helpful booklet on how to manage and reduce stress. Again this is free to [download](#).

#### Centre for Pharmacy Postgraduate Education (CPPE) learning guides

CPPE publish a range of personal development learning [guides](#), including *De-stress you*, *Time management* and *Overcoming anxiety*.

#### Depression Alliance

Depression Alliance is a leading charity providing support for people with depression. They can help people meet and chat to others in their local area, join a self-help group and learn more about depression, treatment and recovery. For further information, see the Depression Alliance [website](#).

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## Addiction

### What is addiction?

Addiction is a pattern of substance use (or processes) leading to clinical impairment or distress when three of the following are present: -

- tolerance
- withdrawal symptoms
- lack of control over amount consumed
- difficulty in cutting down
- devoting increasing amounts of time to the substance abuse
- loss of interest in social/recreational activities
- continuing to use despite the knowledge of problems caused by use.

For further information about addiction, call the Action on Addiction telephone helpline on 0300 330 0659, or visit the Action on Addiction [website](#).

### Other resources to help with addiction

#### Alcoholics Anonymous (AA)

The AA offers support to anybody who is suffering from a drink problem. You can contact them via the AA national helpline on 0845 769 7555, or you can search for a local group meeting on the AA [website](#).

#### Al-Anon Family Groups

Al-Anon Family Groups provide support to anyone whose life is, or has been affected by someone else's drinking. For further information, including the location of your nearest group, see the Al-Anon [website](#).

#### Narcotics Anonymous (NA)

NA is a voluntary organisation for anyone seeking help with a drug problem. For further information, call the NA helpline on 0300 999 1212, or see the NA [website](#).

#### Families Anonymous (FAMANON)

FAMANON offers support to the families and friends of those with a drug problem. For further information, including the location of your nearest group, visit the FAMANON [website](#).

### Release

Release offers free specialist advice to people who have been affected by substance abuse. They also have a counselling service. For further information, call the Release helpline on 020 7324 2989, or visit the Release [website](#).



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## Money management

### Budgeting

Budgeting is not about depriving yourself, it is about taking control and being proactive. It is basically making sure that you are spending less than you are bringing in and planning for both the short and long-term. Do not forget to include registration fees in your budget plan. Help is at hand to give you the tools to manage your money better. The Money Advice Service (MAS) website has budgeting tools to help people manage their finances. These include a:-

- budget planner
- detailed spending breakdown
- cut-back calculator.

For further information, visit the MAS [website](#).

### Debt

If you are facing unmanageable debts and cannot afford to make the repayments, interest and charges could make the debt increase. Non-payment of debt will affect your credit rating and may affect your ability to obtain credit in the future. Free debt advice is available from Step Change. For further information, contact the Step Change telephone helpline on 0800 138 1111, or visit the Step Change [website](#).

The Debt Advice Foundation also provides debt and money management advice. For further information, call the Debt Advice Foundation telephone helpline on 0800 043 40 50, or visit the Debt Advice Foundation [website](#).

Your local Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) can also provide debt advice. For further information, including how to find your local bureau, see the CAB [website](#).

### Benefits

Unemployed people, those who are off work due to illness and those who are on a low income can seek specialist advice on benefit entitlement from their local CAB. For further information, including how to find your local bureau, see the CAB [website](#).

Alternatively, the Turn2us website has a free benefits calculator that can help people to check that they are not missing out on benefits. For further information, visit the Turn2us [website](#).

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### Other useful contacts - Financial assistance

#### Retail Trust

Pharmacy technicians who work in a retail environment can apply to the Retail Trust for assistance. They offer hardship grants, emotional support and advice and information. For further information, call the helpline on 0808 801 0808 or visit the Retail Trust [website](#).

#### Talisman Charitable Trust

The Talisman Charitable Trust give grants to people in poverty or hardship. These include grants for education, health and housing. For further information, see the Talisman [website](#).

#### Turn2us

The Turn2us website provides a free search of hundreds of grant giving charities. There is an A-Z listing of charities as well as a facility to enable you to select criteria, for example, charities that support people with a particular illness or from a particular profession or a particular group, for example, customers of energy or water companies. For further information, see the Turn2us [website](#).

#### Family Action educational grants

Family Action provides services to disadvantaged and socially isolated families. They may also be able to provide financial assistance under one of their grant programmes. They also have a grants search facility on the website, offering a search of other possible funders. For further information, visit the Family Action [website](#).

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## Help with utilities

### British Gas Energy Trust

The British Gas Energy Trust, which incorporates the Scottish Gas Energy Trust, awards grants to pay for gas and/or electricity bills and also offers grants to pay for essential household items such as washing machines and cookers. You do not have to be a British/Scottish Gas customer in order to access this assistance. For further information about what assistance is available and how to apply, visit the [website](#).

### EDF Energy Trust

EDF Energy Trust helps individuals and families in need by giving grants to clear gas and electricity debts. They also award grants to clear other household debts and purchase essential household items. To find out more visit the EDF [website](#).

### The Home Heat Helpline

This is a free national helpline that offers advice on entitlement to grants, benefits and payment schemes. It can also advise you on what basic steps you can take to save you money. You can call the helpline on 0800 33 66 99, or you can visit the website which offers a [free online chat service](#).

## Furniture

### Furniture re-use network (FRN)

FRN supports over 300 re-use charities, who provide essential household furniture and electrical appliances at reasonable prices. For further information and to search for your nearest furniture re-use charity, see the FRN [website](#).

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## Legal advice

### LawWorks clinics network

This is a nationwide network of free legal advice sessions providing free initial advice on various areas of the law. For further information, including how to find your local clinic, see the LawWorks [website](#).

### Citizens Advice

Citizens Advice provide free, independent and confidential advice on a range of legal issues. For further information, including how to find your local bureau, see the Citizens Advice [website](#).

### Bar Pro Bono Unit

The Bar Pro Bono Unit is a charity which helps to find free legal assistance from volunteer barristers. In order to access assistance, individuals must be referred by another organisation, for example, a Citizens Advice Bureau, law centre or other advice agency, or an individual, for example, an MP or a practising lawyer. For further information, see the Bar Pro Bono [website](#).

### Rights of Women

The Rights of Women provide free and confidential legal advice to women. They have a selection of legal guides and handbooks, and a helpline service. For further information, see the Rights of Women [website](#).