

What are the most important things I should know about job interviews? How do they differ from residency interviews?

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The interview process can be an intimidating experience, despite having gone through it several times already. There was an interview for pharmacy school, an interview for a PGY1 residency, and (for some) an interview for a PGY2 residency or fellowship. Now, the interview is for a job, and even though the “rules” of an interview still apply, both the employer and the prospective employee are approaching the interview from a perspective different from when interviewing for a pharmacy school seat or residency position.

As I just mentioned, the “rules” of an interview still apply: be well dressed and groomed for the interview; be on time, polite, and courteous to the people you meet in the interview; maintain a professional demeanor; be prepared with questions for your interviewer or interview team; and don’t ask about rates or salary during the first interview. However, there are additional details that interviewees should keep in mind that may help them be better prepared for an interview and potential job.

1. *Tailor your questions to be about how you will provide for them (the employer), not how they will provide for you.* In pharmacy school and residency interviews, questions from applicants tend to center on the resources and support provided by the school or residency program. They are about patient contact hours, research opportunities, and opportunities for experience. In a job interview, the employer is interested in how the applicant can help him or her achieve the department or hospital goals. Employee satisfaction is still an important feature to evaluate (see No. 4), but consider asking the interviewer, “What are some work goals that you have for the person you hire for this position?” Applicants should learn about their potential places of employment and inquire how they might support or create new services. Consider questions such as “Do you (the employer) see this position having a role in any special services within the hospital or college/university?” or “What are some things that do not yet exist here that you would like this position to investigate and potentially establish?”
2. *Be realistic about what you have done in your previous training.* Both school and residency training offer a wide array of experiences and exposure to unique clinical and research programs. However, in some instances, this experience and exposure is relatively superficial and not sufficient to make the person proficient in that area of practice or research. For example, despite having a 1-month Infectious Disease rotation with involvement in an antibiotic stewardship program, the applicant will most likely not be suited to take on the role of antibiotic steward immediately upon hire. Applicants should let the employer know that their experience is limited and not try to make experiences sound more extensive than they really were. The exception to this is for individuals completing specialty training, but even then, there is still a good deal of growing that needs to occur in a new job environment. The good thing is that employers already know and expect this from new applicants just graduating from training programs. Most will be supportive of the learning and growing period.
3. *Understand that you are still learning and growing and may have to “climb the ladder” to your ideal work position.* Most residencies are designed to expose residents to 3–5 years of clinical experience in a matter of 12 months or less. All of this exposure to higher-level clinical functioning may skew an applicant’s perception of what a job should look like. Although there are always opportunities for jobs that are primarily clinical, many have clerical, service, and distribution components. All of these processes are vital for a clinical pharmacist to understand, and just because he or she has responsibilities in these “nonclinical” functions does not mean that clinical skills and training are not being used. If applicants are

concerned about how their time will be divided between clinical, administrative, and distribution functions, consider asking, "What opportunities will be available to advance and take on a more clinical or administrative role?"

4. *Be willing to compromise, but don't surrender your beliefs, style, or personality.* Although the job market is much smaller now than it was 10 years ago, there are still opportunities for clinical pharmacy practice. The initial position may not be ideal, but applicants should still be aware of what will make their job satisfying and rewarding. For some, it is just being gainfully employed. For others, it may be the opportunity to grow in the position and possibly advance to other positions (either internal or external). And for still others, it may be finding a cohort of colleagues that are good to work with. Regardless of your benchmark for a good job, make sure you will fit into the organization by which you may be hired. Applicants should evaluate if the limitations of the potential work environment are manageable or deal-breakers. Are these limitations outweighed by the benefits of the environment? Ask employers about these limitations and learn more about the situation. Knowing the background may bring clarity to the situation and make it less of a limitation.

As intimidating as interviewing for a job may seem, residency program preceptors and directors have been hard at work preparing their trainees for the job market. Graduating residents and new practitioners have a good breadth of experience to draw on and develop in any work environment. The challenge in transitioning from a residency interview to a job interview is that now the interviewer is looking to add to his or her permanent staff, not hire a temporary trainee. A candidate's marketability will be accentuated if he or she is aware of what the employer needs, expresses interest in helping the employer achieve that goal, and is willing to work with the employer to create a mutually beneficial work environment.

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