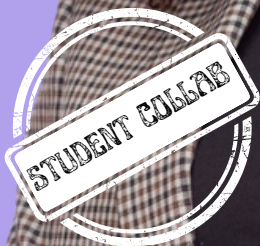


MANCHESTER
1824

The University of Manchester



WHY PHARMACY?



STUDENT COLLAB

INTRODUCTION



Hi,

My name is Deboarah, and I'm a Pharmacy student at The University of Manchester.

Are you:

- Undecided about your next steps after school?
- Thinking about a career in healthcare but not sure what route to take?
- Enjoying studying science but don't know where it can take you next?

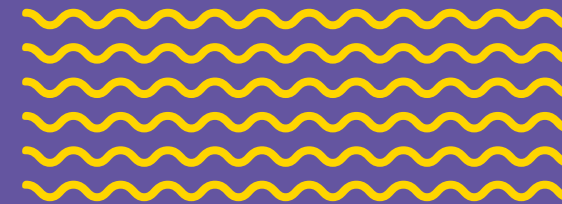
If so, I wrote this handbook for you.

I started by thinking about what would have been useful for me to know before I applied, and compiled this guide to support your decision making.

I hope you find it useful!



WHY PHARMACY? NO, SERIOUSLY, WHY?



I grew up in a household where I was constantly told that being from a Black household meant I had to work twice as hard to stand out.

At the time, I didn't really question it. Stand out how? From who? And why me? But over time, I internalised it. So I did everything 'right'. Homework done. Always on time. Always listening. Always trying.

Some people might call that being a teacher's pet. Me? I was just following instructions: "You need to stand out."

You're probably wondering what any of this has to do with pharmacy. Honestly? At first.. nothing.

But stay with me.

MY SCHOOL YEARS

As I moved through secondary school, I was praised a lot for being hardworking and disciplined. But here's the truth. I didn't realise until later: I wasn't doing it for me. I was doing it to beat stereotypes. To prove a point. To be 'good enough'.

Until one day it clicked. I realised that if I wanted to be the best version of myself, I couldn't just work hard, I had to actually believe in myself. Once I did that, something interesting happened. I realised I wasn't forcing myself to be determined anymore. I just... was. That determined little girl? She was real. And she liked it. I also started noticing something else about myself. I liked helping people. I liked being useful. Deep down, I always knew that whatever career I chose had to be one where I was giving back to society,

CAN YOU SEE WHERE THIS IS GOING?

As I got older, reality kicked in. I knew I had to start thinking seriously about my future and what I wanted to study. One random day, no dramatic music, no life changing montage, I went to the pharmacy. I had one conversation with the pharmacist. Just one. And somehow, everything made sense.

I went home, did all the research (Google was tired of me), and that was it.

I DECIDED I WANT TO BE A PHARMACIST

I didn't write all this to talk about myself for fun even though yes, this is technically my story. I'm telling you this because this book isn't really about me. It's about you and the journey you're about to start. You might not share my background. You might not be Black. You might not have grown up hearing the same messages I did. But chances are, you know what it feels like to carry expectations. Maybe you're the 'smart one' in your family. Maybe you feel pressure. Maybe pharmacy feels like a safe option or the only option you can see right now.

Wherever you're coming from, your reason matters. Before you turn the page, I want you to pause and ask yourself one very important question: Why pharmacy? Not the UCAS answer. Not the "my parents want me to" answer. The real one. Because I won't lie to you: Pharmacy is not an easy journey. There will be days you question yourself, days you're tired, days you want to quit. When those days come, your 'why' might just be the thing that keeps you going.

WHAT IS PHARMACY?



ARE YOU GOING TO BE THE ONE BEHIND THE COUNTER?

If you're thinking about studying pharmacy, get used to that question: you'll hear it a lot.

Pharmacy is one of those professions that everyone interacts with, yet very few people actually understand. Most people can confidently tell you what a doctor does, or roughly explain what a nurse's role is. But ask someone what a pharmacist does, and suddenly the answers become vague.

"Medicines, I guess?"

"Like... the shop?"

"Isn't it basically chemistry?"

Honestly, that's not their fault. Pharmacy just isn't spoken about as much as medicine or dentistry. It's rarely the career people push in schools, it's not always explained properly, and it often sits quietly in the background of healthcare despite being absolutely essential to it.

PHARMACISTS WORK IN MORE PLACES THAN YOU REALISE

You'll find pharmacists in:

- Community pharmacies
- Hospitals and specialist clinics
- GP practices
- The pharmaceutical industry
- Regulatory and policy roles
- Research, education, and public health

Regardless of where they work, the skills that matter most are often the same:

- Clear communication
- Attention to detail
- Problem-solving
- Ethical judgement
- Confidence in decision-making

THERE'S MORE TO IT THAN YOU THINK...

Pharmacy isn't about memorising drug names and hoping for the best. It's about understanding people, understanding medicines, and knowing how the two interact safely.

Pharmacy is far more than dispensing medicines. Pharmacists are medication experts. We are responsible for making sure medicines are safe, appropriate, and effective for each individual patient. That means checking prescriptions, preventing harmful interactions, adjusting doses, and making clinical decisions that directly affect patient safety.

We also work closely with patients and other healthcare professionals to optimise treatment and improve health outcomes. Patient education is a huge part of the role. For example, if a patient is prescribed an inhaler, a pharmacist doesn't just supply it and move on. They check if it's suitable for the patient's condition, ensure it won't clash with other medicines, and take the time to explain exactly how to use it properly.

Because a medicine that's prescribed correctly but used incorrectly? It doesn't work.

This is why pharmacists are not "just the people behind the counter". They are a core part of the healthcare system, quietly preventing errors, improving outcomes, and advocating for patients every single day.

The reason pharmacy is often misunderstood isn't because the role is small; it's because the role happens behind the scenes. A lot of what pharmacists do is preventative. When we do our jobs well, nothing dramatic happens. No emergencies. No headlines. Just safer care. But that doesn't make it any less important.

And now that you know what pharmacy really is - not the stereotype, not the joke version - let's talk about what it's actually like to study it at university.

PHARMACY AT UNIVERSITY

MY EXPERIENCE

A typical pharmacy week for me at The University of Manchester is a mix of lectures, workshops, laboratory practicals, and skills-based sessions.

At Manchester, we use a teaching approach called Enquiry-Based Learning (EBL). This is a student focused style of learning where we work in small groups on patient cases. We're given clinical scenarios and expected to apply what we've learned to solve problems, discuss treatment options, and think like future healthcare professionals.

EBL helps build skills you actually need as a pharmacist: communication, critical thinking, teamwork, and confidence. It's less about memorising facts and more about understanding how to use knowledge in real situations.

Alongside EBL, we have mandatory lectures, regular lab practicals, and skills sessions that prepare us for patient facing assessments. At Manchester, we don't do traditional OSCEs until fourth year. Instead, we do something called SLEs (Simulated Learning Events). These assess similar skills, such as communication, clinical reasoning, and professionalism, but the format can differ.

It's important to know that assessment styles vary by university. Some universities use OSCEs, some use SLEs, and others may use a mixture. Regardless of the name, the aim is the same: to make sure you can safely and effectively interact with patients.

Pharmacy at university is rewarding but, let's be honest, it can also be intense. There's a lot of content, and much of your learning happens outside scheduled teaching. You'll need to manage your time well, stay organised, and be prepared to teach yourself at times.

Group work is a big part of the course. Some groups are great. Others will test your patience. Learning how to communicate, compromise, and still get the work done is part of the process.

There will be weeks where deadlines pile up and motivation dips. That doesn't mean you're failing. It means you're human. The key isn't being perfect, it's being consistent and asking for help early.



"IT'S VERY HANDS ON AND VERY BUSY, BUT NEVER BORING."



PLACEMENTS

Another key part of the degree is placements. These give you early exposure to real pharmacy environments and help bridge the gap between theory and practice.

At Manchester, placements include time in community pharmacy, hospital settings, and general practice. Even in first year, although placements are shorter, they are incredibly valuable.

They help you understand what being a pharmacist actually looks like beyond the lecture theatre and allow you to build confidence from the very beginning of the course.

Studying pharmacy at university shows you very quickly that this degree isn't just about exams. It's about developing into a safe, confident, and competent healthcare professional.

"YES, IT'S CHALLENGING, BUT IT'S ALSO REWARDING, IMPACTFUL, AND SO MUCH BIGGER THAN PEOPLE THINK."



TEACHING AND LEARNING

EXAMS

At Manchester we have integrated exams which is a content heavy exam worth 60 marks. It's 3 hours long, split into two exams lasting 1.5 hrs each and comprises short case-based questions. It tests clinical knowledge, mostly, then we have a calculations exam.

Then we have the famous preparation for practice exam paper, which prepares you for the GPHC pre reg-exam. We have a pass mark that varies each year based on how well the cohort does, but don't worry, you can relax because it's formative (doesn't count towards your grade) in your first year, but after that it becomes summative, and you need to pass it to move on to the next year.

GROUP WORK

Then we have group work. This is a hit or miss, honestly, but as I've mentioned earlier you just have to try your best to make it work for you. I know sometimes working in a group can be overwhelming especially if someone isn't putting in the work. Group coursework is only worth a specific percentage and doesn't weigh as much as the integrated exam, but this can be the difference between you getting a 2:1 and a 1st. You have two pieces of group coursework during the year, one in each semester, and it varies.

COURSEWORK

Finally, you have individual coursework, which is similar to group coursework and follows the same criteria in the sense that it's worth a certain percentage and does not weigh as much as integrated. This is also twice a year one, in each semester.

Please note:

All course details are based on my time at Manchester, so your experience may differ. Please check the University website for the most up-to-date information.

GETTING INVOLVED

Let me be honest with you, when I first started university, I didn't really believe in extracurricular activities.

I genuinely thought, "I'm studying pharmacy, I'll automatically get a job. Why do I need a packed CV?"

Yeah... I was wrong.

Studying pharmacy opened my eyes to just how many different roles and career paths exist. Pharmacy isn't just one job, it's a whole world.

Once I realised that, everything changed.

A LITTLE SECRET ABOUT ME...

I'm really interested in industry and commercial pharmacy roles within the pharmaceutical industry that go beyond the traditional pharmacist pathway. Because I knew I wanted something different, I started putting myself out there.

"THAT DECISION CHANGED MY UNIVERSITY EXPERIENCE COMPLETELY."



MY EXPERIENCE OF JOINING IN

Through getting involved, I've had opportunities I never imagined:

- Joining African-Caribbean Medical Society (ACMS)
- Hosting a webinar with a UK health leader with over 50 attendees
- Being invited to the Houses of Parliament
- Becoming part of the National Sales Network
- Being selected for a competitive, all-expenses paid student programme to Singapore
- Joining GPhC Student Voices
- Being selected for a Black leadership programme
- And many more

I'm not saying this to boast, honestly. I'm saying this because none of this would have happened if I just went to lectures and went home. My biggest advice: get involved, as University is more than just your degree.

Get involved in:

- Societies
- Leadership roles
- Webinars and events
- Conferences
- Mentoring schemes
- Programmes and opportunities (even if you think you won't get in, apply anyway)

All of this builds your confidence, helps you figure out what you actually enjoy and makes you stand out!

Find your people

One thing that really helped me and still helps me is making friends on my course.

Your course mates

- Understand exactly what you're going through
- Can support you during stressful periods
- Can revise with you, motivate you, and encourage you

Build a community

You don't have to do this degree alone. And don't be afraid to reach out to your lecturers. They're there to help you. Ask questions. Go to office hours. Clarify things early instead of panicking later.

Look after yourself

This one is important.

- Attend your lectures
- Make sure you actually understand the content
- But also... rest

Don't be too harsh on yourself. Socialise. Have fun. University goes quicker than you think, and before you know it, you'll be in the real world wondering where the time went.



MAKING THE MOST OF YOUR TIME AT UNI

MY FINAL TAKE-AWAY

Say yes to opportunities.
Apply to extra-curricular activities even when you're unsure.
Put yourself out there.

You'll thank yourself later!

And please NETWORK. I'm a big fan of LinkedIn. Use it. Connect with people. Reach out respectfully.

Opportunities often come from conversations, not applications.

Also... remember how much you're paying to be at uni. Don't let it go to waste!

"UNIVERSITY ISN'T JUST ABOUT GETTING A DEGREE, IT'S ABOUT GROWING INTO THE PERSON YOU WANT TO BECOME."



PREPARING FOR YOUR PHARMACY INTERVIEW

So, you've applied to study pharmacy at uni and you've got an interview!

Here are some sample questions (based on my experience, yours may differ), and tips on how to answer them without panicking.

Why do you want to study pharmacy?



"I like science and helping people."
(It's true... but everyone says it)



Tip: Try to show a genuine interest in pharmacy and demonstrate you've actually done your research.

Example:

Through my research and experience, I've learned that pharmacists play a key role in preventing medication errors, educating patients, and working closely with other healthcare professionals. That responsibility is something I find motivating, and it's why pharmacy stands out to me as a career.



What do you think a pharmacist does?



Your interviewer is checking your understanding of the role.

Strong answer structure:

- Medicines safety
- Patient interaction
- Working with other professionals
- Responsibility

Example:

A pharmacist is a medication expert responsible for ensuring medicines are safe, effective, and appropriate for individual patients. This includes checking prescriptions, preventing interactions, counselling patients, and supporting other healthcare professionals. It's a role that combines clinical knowledge with communication and ethical decision making.

Now this shows you definitely know your stuff!

Tell me about a time you worked in a team



I would recommend using the STAR technique to answer this:

- S - Situation: What was happening?
- T - Task: What was your responsibility?
- A - Action: What did you do?
- R - Result: What happened and what did you learn?

Example:

Situation - During a group project at school, we had to complete an assignment under a tight deadline.

Task - My role was to help organise the workload and contribute to the research.

Action - I communicated with the group, suggested dividing tasks, and checked in regularly to make sure everyone was on track.

Result - We completed the project on time and worked well together. I learned the importance of communication and adaptability when working in a team.

What would you do if you didn't understand something?



This is a trap for people who pretend to know everything.

Best answer: show humility and safety. It's okay to not understand everything!

Example:

If I didn't understand something, I would ask for clarification or seek help rather than guess. In healthcare, patient safety is too important to make assumptions. I'm comfortable asking questions and using available resources to make sure I understand things properly.

See how this answer linked back to healthcare? Even healthcare professionals don't understand everything; it's about how you manage this and go about it.

How do you handle pressure or challenges?



They want self-awareness, not perfection.

Example:

When I'm under pressure, I try to stay organised and prioritise tasks. If I feel overwhelmed, I break work into smaller steps and ask for support when needed. I've learned that managing stress is about preparation and knowing when to ask for help.

This is a very vital question especially in healthcare, as some days you could be going through intense pressure with staff or patients, so you need to know how to manage this effectively.

"NO FANCY LANGUAGE IS NEEDED, JUST SHOW YOU KNOW WHAT YOU'RE TALKING ABOUT."

QUESTIONS YOU SHOULD ASK

You will have the opportunity to ask questions as well as answer them, which is very important.

Always ask at least one question.

Good options:

- What support is available for pharmacy students in first year?
- How does your course prepare students for professional practice?
- What qualities do successful pharmacy students usually have?

This shows confidence and interest, not arrogance.

Final interview pep talk:

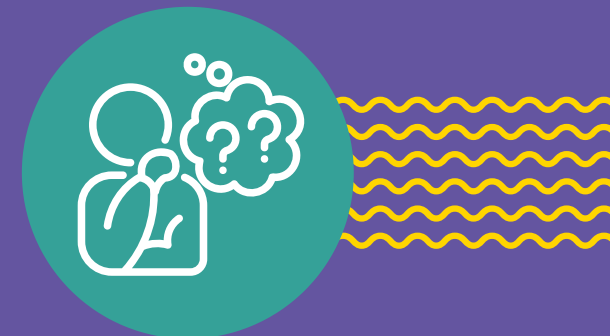
You don't need to:

- Sound like a pharmacist already
- Know everything
- Have perfect answers

You do need to:

- Be honest
- Show interest
- Show willingness to learn

And remember, they invited you to the interview because they already see potential.



THINGS NO ONE TELLS YOU

IF YOU'RE FEELING UNSURE OR NERVOUS, OR ARE QUESTIONING IF PHARMACY IS REALLY FOR YOU, YOU'RE NOT ALONE.

Almost every pharmacy student feels this way at some point. Some feel it before they even start. Others feel it halfway through first year, during exams, or when things don't go exactly to plan. Doubt doesn't mean you're not meant to be here. It usually means you care.

You don't have to be naturally smart

Pharmacy rewards consistency, not perfection. The students who do well aren't always the ones who understand everything immediately; they're the ones who keep showing up, asking questions, and improving over time. Struggling with content doesn't mean you're failing. It means you're learning something new. And that's the whole point of university.

Everyone's path looks different (and that's normal)

This part is important. Not everyone studying pharmacy is 18, fresh out of sixth form, and following a perfect timeline. In my cohort, I have classmates who are over 40. Some have families. Some changed careers. Some returned to education after years away, and they are thriving.

Here's a little secret about me. When I began first year, I felt slightly embarrassed about being older than most people. I kept wondering if I was behind or if I'd done something wrong. But as time went on, I realised something. I wasn't the only one.

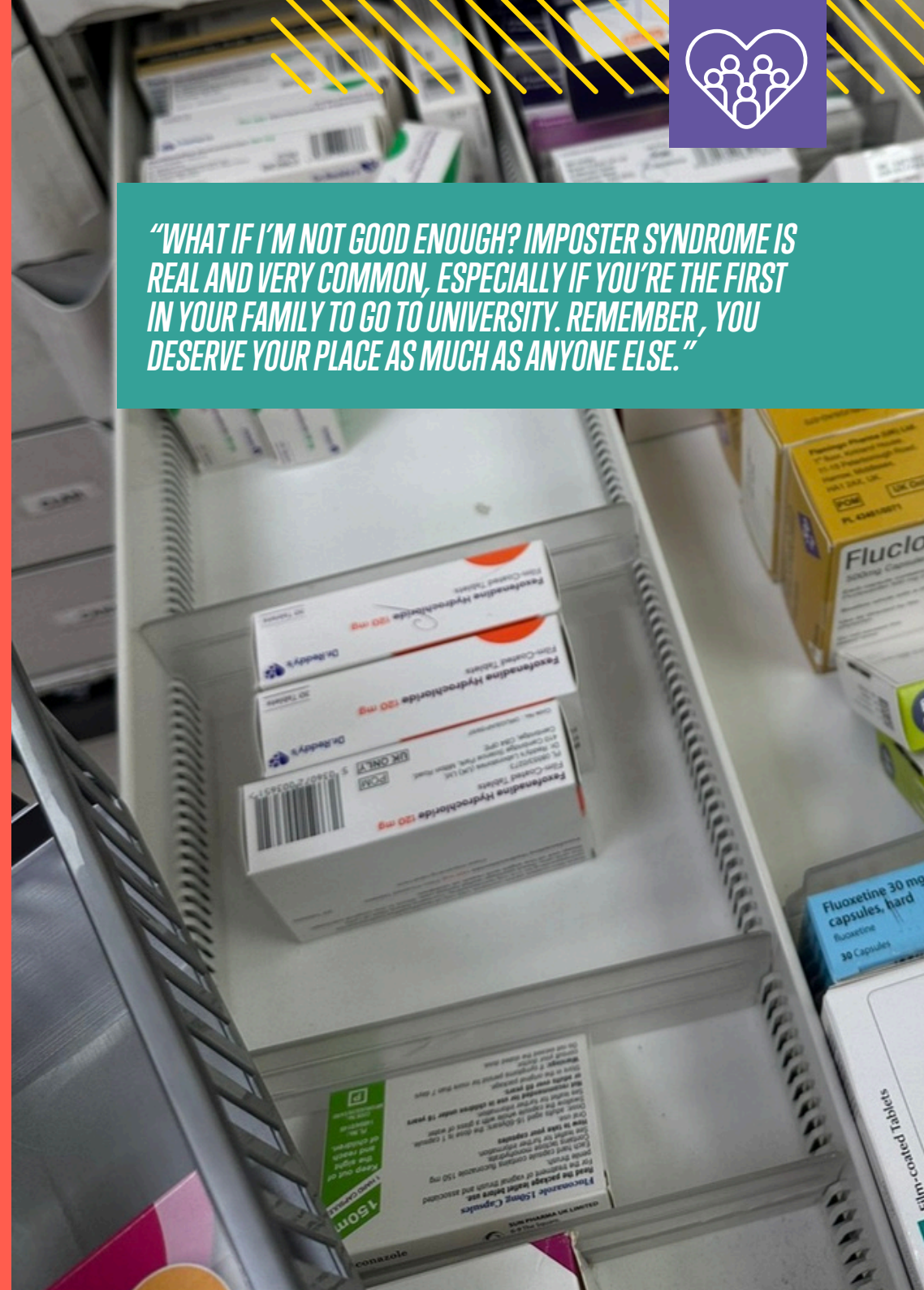
Most of my close friends had also taken gap years. Some had taken more than one. And the people I thought were 'ahead' weren't judging me at all: they were just trying to survive pharmacy, just like me. Turns out, I wasn't even the only 'old' one. There is:

- No age limit on ambition.
- No fixed timeline for success.
- No correct route into pharmacy.

Whether you took time out, resat exams, did a foundation year, or started later than planned, your journey is still valid.



"WHAT IF I'M NOT GOOD ENOUGH? IMPOSTER SYNDROME IS REAL AND VERY COMMON, ESPECIALLY IF YOU'RE THE FIRST IN YOUR FAMILY TO GO TO UNIVERSITY. REMEMBER, YOU DESERVE YOUR PLACE AS MUCH AS ANYONE ELSE."



AND NOW, I'M STILL HERE CHOOSING PHARMACY

I still have days where I question myself, but the difference is now I remember why I'm doing this.

PHARMACY IS A JOURNEY

Don't just survive pharmacy, take care of yourself while you are doing it.

- Hold onto your why.
- Trust your journey.

And when things feel hard, know that you're not the only one who has felt this way and you won't be the last.

Remember, you've got this!

Thanks for reading,

Deborah Olayiwole



MEET TOMI
PHARMACY REP



FEEL FREE TO CONTACT TOMI ON ALL THINGS PHARMACY!
INSTAGRAM: TTOMI10

HOBBIES
TOMI ENJOYS COOKING, DOING LASHES AND CONTENT CREATION IN HER FREE TIME

ACMS
AFRICAN-CARIBBEAN STUDENT SOCIETY



THE UNIVERSITY OF MANCHESTER

FACULTY OF BIOLOGY, MEDICINE AND HEALTH

This brochure was written by Pharmacy student Deborah Olayiwole.
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STUDENT BLOG



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