



## My experience as a pharmacist intern

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The internship year is not solely an exit stage from university but also an imperative juncture for joining the work environment after completing your four year degree. It is a leap towards the professional world and a new beginning to learn and develop new skills. Initially, it might appear as a state of anxiety as you are no longer a student but an employee who works day and night to earn a living but gradually you get used to this new life. Being positive and considering every event that came up as a lesson and my mistakes as a new learning opportunity elated and inspired me to keep working in my internship year. I completed my degree in 2016 and was exhilarated by the thought of getting over with my studies and working as an employee.

However, in the beginning I was confused and not sure about the exact place that would be appropriate for me to do my internship. I have always been an Eastern Cape Province resident and did most of my schooling there. I then finally decided that it was time to leave my comfort zone and apply for internship posts in other South African provinces. In addition, I also wanted to make full use of my internship year and learn about other cultures and provincial health systems. I manoeuvred for learning as much as I could during my internship year, in order to return to work in my home province and make use of my experience to create a difference.

I was fortunate to have been appointed as a pharmacist intern in 2017, in one of the hospitals in the Western Cape Province. After getting this opportunity I was ecstatic and perturbed at the same time. I had never been to Western Cape before and was really worried about whether I would manage to cope in a new environment, far away from my home. I finally made the decision to take the opportunity and start my internship in one of the district hospitals in Cape Town.

The first three months were hard and hectic. I had to adapt to the Western Cape Province work environment along with learning new cultures. The majority of the community members', staff members' and patient's mother tongue was Afrikaans. I was only well acquainted with English and IsiXhosa.

However, this never became an impediment in my internship year. I saw it as an opportunity to grow and learn other languages and cultures. Being positive is a primary means to work towards

your goals and keep moving. This was true in my case as well. Initially, in the first few weeks at my workplace, I was impassive and felt unfit for the working world. I was the only intern in that hospital, working with pharmacy staff who were well-experienced and were confident in their world to question doctors about their prescribing and diagnosing patterns. I also struggled to understand the dispensing software. Nonetheless, I was aware of the fact that quitting is not the right option and I had to finish my internship by all means. I continuously kept reminding myself of the reasons that made me choose Western Cape for my internship. As weeks passed by, I started to build my confidence in the work that was assigned to me and also adjusted in the working environment.

I started reading and acquainted myself with the guidelines and provincial code lists. I was never afraid to ask questions and do extra reading in order to improve my knowledge. I was fortunate to have a supportive tutor and helpful colleagues that were always willing to teach and share knowledge. With time, I managed to link the knowledge I garnered from university with the expectations of the working environment. I was also advised by my tutor to always carry a pocket diary, in which I use to write all the new things I learned each day.

This helped me to be a better intern, as I always used my notes to ponder over each day and see the sections that I need to work on in future. Even today, despite being a registered pharmacist, I still carry a pocket diary.

I enjoyed the pharmacy internship programme from the Western Cape Province. It is well coordinated and exposes you to all the necessary training that is needed to be a better pharmacist. The training facilities provide all the support that an intern needs to complete their CPDs and pass the pre-registration exams. Most of the time, I cherished the research aspect of the training, wherein all the interns were expected to do a research project. Each intern was given all the support and guidance that was needed to complete their projects and by the end of the year, interns had to present their projects on their final day of research.

I struggled at first to do my research project, but my tutor and colleagues encouraged me throughout my journey. They gave all the counselling and assistance I required to succeed in my research

project. My project was focussed on mapping the processes of submitting applications to the provincial pharmacy and therapeutics committee (PPTC) in order to add medicines to the provincial code list. It was a challenging project for me as I was not familiar with most of the requirements of sending an application to PPTC but through continuous support and guidance from my mentor I was able to complete my research. I am grateful for their suggestions because my project won the second runner-up award at the Intern Research Day. I then completed the CPDs and was able to pass my internship exams. This day held a significant position in my life as I was really delighted because of the fact that I left my home to do an internship in a province that I had never been to and was rewarded for it.

After completing my internship, I had to return to my home province. I returned to Eastern Cape in 2018 to do my community service with greater strength to carve a difference in my career. The research experience that I accorded from my internship motivated me to enrol for a master's degree and also to work in a research pharmacy. I am thriving to learn each day and am thankful for all the experiences that I encountered in my life. My internship working environment also gave me an opportunity to learn Afrikaans. I have not gained proficiency in the language

but at least I left Western Cape having a basic knowledge and vocabulary of the Afrikaans language.

In contemporary times, we are all living a life that was never expected. The acquaintance of the world with the novel Coronavirus has taken a great number of lives and has petrified nations worldwide. I can imagine the apprehension that is faced by the pharmacy students who are in their final year in such unprecedented times. I believe that this too shall pass and they will soon begin to live a life of normality. I wish the 2020 BPharm 4<sup>th</sup> year students all the best in their studies and the upcoming internship journey in the year 2021.



*My Internship year, 2017*

## News



# Andy Gray awarded 2020 Helen Clark-JoPPP Award

The Helen Clark-Journal of Pharmaceutical Policy and Practice (JoPPP) Award recognises the talents of exceptional individuals who are making a significant contribution to the field of pharmaceutical policy and practice. It is a yearly award that started in 2018.

The PSSA is proud to announce that one of our own – Andy Gray, a well-known member in both the PSSA and SAAHIP – is one of the winners of the 2020 Helen Clark-JoPPP Award.

Andy is a graduate of Rhodes University and a senior lecturer at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. He is the chairman of the PSSA Fellows Committee, and is an Honorary Life Member of both the PSSA and SAAHIP.

Congratulations Andy, the PSSA, SAAHIP and South Africa are proud of you!

