

Residents' perspectives: Weighing your options in pursuing a postgraduate year 2 pharmacy residency

After graduation, a postgraduate year 1 (PGY1) pharmacy practice resident is expected to solve complex problems, such as develop a complete therapeutic plan or answer difficult drug information questions. These tasks can be intimidating and often require further refinement of a resident's skills. Such refinement can be attained through the completion of a postgraduate year 2 (PGY2) residency. While some residents would rather begin practice to gain these skills versus undergoing another year of residency training, there are distinct advantages to the PGY2 pharmacy practice residency. Newly graduated PGY1 residents should consider both the advantages and disadvantages of a PGY2 residency before deciding on their next professional steps.

Advantages of a PGY2 residency.

Character development. According to the American Society of Health-System Pharmacists (ASHP) accreditation standard, the purpose of a PGY2 residency is "to develop accountability; practice patterns; habits; and expert knowledge, skills, attitudes, and abilities in the respective advanced area of pharmacy practice."¹ PGY1 residents have begun to cultivate these general competencies but often do not assert themselves as autonomous practitioners. Another year of residency allows the development of independence through an umbrella experience. It is

likely that the specialized resident will struggle at some point during the PGY2 residency; such experience is not always negative but rather fosters creativity and determination—essential characteristics for professional growth. Furthermore, the feeling of ownership encourages residents to critically analyze situations with the goal of professional and personal improvement. Adaptation to a high-intensity workload leads to flexibility and exceptional organizational skills. Overall, the confidence gained from this experience promotes clinical maturity and the pursuit of more challenging and professionally rewarding goals.



Research and scholarly activity. A PGY2 resident has typically completed at least one original research project and prepared a manuscript that is suitable for publication during the first year of residency. Important lessons in research are learned through trial and error during the PGY1 residency; thus, a PGY2 residency offers another opportunity to create an efficient approach to a more intricate research design. The results of one study revealed that PGY2 residents are more likely than PGY1 residents to report results when submitting an abstract for inclusion at a research conference (30.8% versus 10.5%, $p = 0.0185$), and this corresponds with a higher percentage of published manuscripts (10.2% versus 3.5%, $p = 0.0461$).² PGY1 residents tend to have little, if any, experience with scholarly writing outside of the manuscript based on their residency projects. A PGY2 resident gains further refinement of scholarly writing with guidance from research mentors, an important skill for future independent research. In addition, a specialized residency may offer an opportunity for participation in case reports, review articles, and grant writing.

Teaching development. First-year residents often serve as copreceptors to pharmacy students, and some PGY1 programs provide teaching certificates; however, this may not provide enough training to translate into considerable entry-level teaching skills for those interested in academia. First-year teaching certificate programs often provide core teaching skills such as lecture development, whereas a PGY2 teaching certificate program delves into more-advanced topics, such as course coordination, small-group facilitation, and active learning.³ In addition, this may allow for didactic teaching opportunities within the resident's PGY2 specialty area. Outside academia, many PGY2 residents will serve as

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the primary experiential preceptors for students. The American College of Clinical Pharmacy's guidelines for resident teaching experiences recommend that PGY2 residents serve as the primary preceptors for at least two blocks of students, under the guidance of teaching mentors.⁴ This provides exposure to the responsibilities of clinical faculty and helps the PGY2 resident to become effective at balancing preceptor obligations with clinical practice.

Professional networking. Since PGY2 residents understand the basic foundation of a residency program, they may be better able to prioritize their tasks. This allows them to set aside some time to focus on networking and establishing credibility and rapport with colleagues and other healthcare professionals. Relationships may be developed throughout the country during the interview process, and networks can be especially expanded when PGY1 and PGY2 residencies are completed at different institutions. The contacts garnered during the PGY2 residency may result in future organizational involvement and career possibilities.

Job opportunities. The many accomplishments and qualities of successful PGY2 residents can significantly improve their marketability. PGY2 residents may already be board certified or have an acceleration in eligibility requirements for the specialty examination. They usually have had many interview experiences through the residency matching process, so they feel more comfortable and prepared for job interviews. Currently, a PGY1 residency is recommended as the minimum level of training necessary for pharmacists involved in direct patient care, whereas a PGY2 residency allows for the care of special patient populations.⁵ As more residents graduate from PGY2 residencies, there has been a shift in supply and demand so that health systems are more able to demand specialized training.⁶ This demand is encouraged by various pharmacy organizations, such as the Society of Infectious Diseases Pharmacists, which states that on-the-job experience is insufficient and unreliable training for specialization.⁷ A PGY2 residency is often a prerequisite for

candidates in academia, and it is recommended for positions with research or teaching involvement.⁸

Disadvantages of a PGY2 residency.

Job restriction. While PGY2 training may be necessary or desired for many clinical jobs, it can also create the issue of overspecialization. This is especially likely in a resident who is geographically limited. The availability of ideal career opportunities after residency varies by location and demand for the specialty area. If the options are few, the PGY2 graduate may need to be flexible in job settings or responsibilities. For example, an ambulatory care PGY2 graduate who cannot find a clinical position may have to accept a staff pharmacist position at a local hospital. He or she may not be as efficient at verifying orders for inpatients after a year of training in an outpatient setting. While waiting for other job options to become available, the PGY2 residency graduate should look for opportunities to use his or her residency training (e.g., volunteer to lead clinical projects, review order sets).

Goal misalignment. Goal misalignment may arise if the resident did not clearly identify goals before pursuing a residency or if those goals changed. Since applications for PGY2 resident positions are due in the middle of the PGY1 year before the resident has had many electives, it can be difficult to choose among types of PGY2 programs. The resident may discover a passion in the latter half of the PGY1 year but may have already committed to a different specialty. Also, this passion could be an interest in teaching that would be better aligned with a college of pharmacy-based PGY2 program or could be an interest in research that would be better explored in a doctor of philosophy program. The possibility of goal misalignment needs to be recognized early by the PGY1 resident, and guidance from a mentor should be sought. This will allow a more thoughtful and open approach when applying for a PGY2 residency.

Work-life balance. A specialty residency has many of the same requirements as a PGY1 residency, with more emphasis on autonomy and responsibility. It may be difficult at times to effectively manage the many project requirements in addition

to taking on a specialized role within the healthcare team. Consequently, the commitment for PGY2 residents may require as much time as the first year of residency, if not more, depending on the program. Work-life balance may be further complicated by family and friends who do not fully comprehend the intensity and demands of a pharmacy residency. Residents transitioning to a PGY2 program should identify work-life imbalances and obtain feedback from residency directors and preceptors to help evaluate their responsibilities and priorities.

Opportunity cost. Perhaps the most well-known disadvantage of residencies is the associated opportunity cost, or the value of the best forgone alternative. In 2010, the average salary for a pharmacist was \$111,570⁹; the stipend for PGY2 residents is generally around \$40,000.¹⁰ In addition, many of the expenses that would be covered by a job are not covered by the residency program, such as relocation expenses and the cost of board certification. In light of sacrificing a higher salary for another year of training, completion of a PGY2 residency offers a lifetime of invaluable skill and opportunity including marketability and job satisfaction—a return on investment that may never have a monetary value.

Match process. As anyone who has participated in the ASHP Resident Matching Program can attest, the process can be extremely intense. It requires a significant time commitment during what is often the busiest time of a PGY1 residency and can be expensive when the interviews are out of town. Residency positions are becoming increasingly competitive as the overall pharmacist job market becomes more saturated and the demand for specialized pharmacists increases. In 2013, 32% of PGY1 graduates who competed did not match with a PGY2 program.¹¹ Residents should enhance their competitiveness by focusing on clinical skill development, research, and goal alignment during the early months of their PGY1 residency.

Conclusion. Pursuing a PGY2 residency is an important decision, and the advantages and disadvantages must be weighed carefully. A PGY2 residency offers invaluable experiences that cultivate

clinical maturity, foster critical thinking, and shape residents' roles in the pharmacy profession.

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