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What is return to practice?

There are many reasons why people may decide not to work for a period of time. For example, you may be working in another profession, or you may have taken time off to bring up a family, care for a relative, recover from a period of illness or go travelling. It may be that you have always worked as a pharmacist or pharmacy technician but wish to change your sector of practice. If this applies to you and you are considering a return to the workplace, you need to make sure that you can practise safely and competently.

It is worth visiting the [return to practice section of the Royal Pharmaceutical Society \(RPS\)](#) website. This resource provides general information on returning to practice as well as tips on work shadowing and mentoring support.

Who can support my return to practice?

CPPE provide two courses for pharmacy professionals returning to the register or returning to pharmacy practice after a career break or change in sector. Further details are in this FAQ document and on the CPPE website.

As well as attending our Return to practice course, you may be able to get support from your local CPPE tutor. To contact your local tutor, visit: www.cppe.ac.uk/about-cppe/find-a-tutor

The RPS provides several opportunities for networking with pharmacists. For example, there are online groups and [local groups](#) (RPS In Your Area) where you can contact others in your chosen sector and find out what competences are required. Some local groups have a dedicated contact for return to practice and you can find this on the RPS website.

The RPS support service can answer enquiries about all aspects of pharmacy and produces guidance and support documents. It is also developing return to practice support for members. RPS support can be contacted on 0845 257 2570 (RPS members only).

The National Association of Women Pharmacists (NAWP) supports both men and women returning to practice and pharmacists changing sector of practice. They can assist with work placements and provide [networking opportunities](#), and they offer a mentoring scheme. For further information, visit the [NAWP website](#).

Registration of pharmacists and pharmacy technicians

How do I return to practice if I'm not registered as a pharmacist or pharmacy technician?

If you are not currently registered as a pharmacist or pharmacy technician in Great Britain, you will need to register with the [General Pharmaceutical Council \(GPhC\)](#). You will need to complete the relevant paperwork and pay the appropriate fee. For further information and to register, visit the General Pharmaceutical Council website.

If you have been off the GPhC register for less than one year, you will need to apply for [restoration to the register](#). This is a relatively simple process of completing an application and ensuring your CPD and revalidation are up to date. If you have been off the register for more than one year you will need to apply to [return to the register](#). This will require you to compile a portfolio of evidence and self-assessment against the GPhC standards for pharmacy professionals.

I was on the RPSGB non-practising register . What do I have to do to register?

If you were on the RPSGB non-practising register when the RPSGB demerged on 27 September 2010 you would not have been transferred to the General Pharmaceutical Council register, so you will have to apply to join it. The General Pharmaceutical Council doesn't have a non-practising register. You will need to make sure you meet the requirements for registration before you apply to join, and you may need to complete additional education, training, or experience.

I took a career break and came off the register. What do I have to do to return to the register?

You must submit a [portfolio of evidence](#) to the General Pharmaceutical Council as part of the registration process. Through the Return to the register course, CPPE provides free workshops to support you in gathering and presenting evidence for your portfolio. These run through the year as an online course supported by three evening webinars, and as face-to-face short courses. You will also find that the activities undertaken at the Return to practice course will provide you with evidence for your portfolio.

More details on the CPPE Return to the register course are available on the [CPPE website](#).

I completed my initial qualification and pre-registration but have never registered with the General Pharmaceutical Council. How do I get onto the register?

If you have never been registered as a pharmacy professional, you should contact the General Pharmaceutical Council with information on your qualifications including dates, and circumstances. They will be able to advise on your available options to register as a pharmacy professional.

Revalidation and continuing professional development

What knowledge and skills do I need before I return to practice?

You have a professional obligation to be competent to practise in your chosen area. You will need to identify the skills and knowledge you already have, what gaps there are in your knowledge and experience and how you plan to fill these gaps. For example, if you plan to return to community practice you will need to be aware of changes in legislation, changes to the pharmacy contract and newly re-classified medicines.

The Royal Pharmaceutical Society's Foundation Practice Framework (FPF) supports pharmacists at all levels to achieve professional skills and behaviours that will enable you to keep up to date and continue to advance your practice. Using this framework can help you identify any gaps in your knowledge or skills.

There is a similar framework available for pharmacy technicians in medicines management.

You might also find it useful to read journals and access recent RPS guidance to identify changes in practice.

What courses are available if I want to return to community pharmacy practice?

We run a Return to practice course of four full days over four to six weeks with a primary focus on community pharmacy. It is designed for pharmacy professionals who have been out of practice for more than a year and those changing sector. If you decide to book a place on the course, you will be asked to sign a declaration stating that you intend to return to community pharmacy and provide NHS services within the next six months. There is a charge for the course (currently £100 for the online course and £450 for the residential). This is a subsidised course and is significantly funded by NHS Health Education England. Further details are available at: www.cppe.ac.uk/career/return-to-practice. We use collegiate learning, building on current skills and knowledge of participants and with a range of purpose-designed course books. The same core materials are used for both courses with the same learning outcomes.

The residential course runs as two blocks of two days separated by an interval of four or five weeks. Course fees include all course material and tuition as well as meals and accommodation for the duration of the course. The tutors work with participants to share knowledge and skills and build confidence, with an emphasis on community pharmacy practice in England. We cover General Pharmaceutical Council requirements, the community pharmacy contract, controlled drug update, consultations skills, medicines optimisation and public health services. A sample agenda is available on the CPPE website.

The online course, introduced as a response to the covid pandemic, consists of an evening introductory webinar, and then four full day (9am-4pm) tutor supported webinars spread over about 6 weeks. A mix of methods is used throughout the course with a lively combination of presentation, quizzes, polls, practice scenarios, breakouts, and challenges.

If you intend to return to community practice, we recommend that you undertake learning on NHS repeat dispensing and the Community Pharmacist Consultation Service (CPCS) and as these will increase the likelihood of employment. CPPE provides a learning programme and e-assessment for NHS repeat dispensing and on CPCS.

Can I access CPPE learning materials if I am not on the register?

If you are not on the General Pharmaceutical Council register and you want to access CPPE programmes, you can do so by registering on the CPPE website. You will then be able to buy programmes that are available to purchase.

If you are on the General Pharmaceutical Council register, are living in England and have registered with CPPE, you will not have to pay for most of our programmes, as they are funded by Health Education England.

If you are registered with the General Pharmaceutical Council but practise outside of England, you will be able to access some of our learning programmes and all our e-assessments. To access other learning materials, you will need to buy programmes that are available to purchase.

I would like to attend a Return to practice course but cannot afford the fee; is any help available?

If you are or have been a registered pharmacist and you are in financial hardship, you may be able to receive

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advice or support from [Pharmacist Support](#).

What if I need to cancel my place on the course?

Please read the following information, which is our cancellation policy for the Return to practice course.

- Bookings will only be processed subject to acceptance of CPPE's right to charge a fee for late cancellations and non-attendance.
- All cancellations must be notified to CPPE head office in writing. Acceptable means of communication include letter, fax, and email.
- CPPE will acknowledge receipt of your cancellation within seven working days.
- If your cancellation is received 30 days or more prior to Day 1 of the course, this will result in a reimbursement of the course fee.
- If a cancellation is not received 30 days prior to Day 1 of the course, CPPE reserves the right to retain 50 percent of the course fee and will reimburse the remaining 50 percent.
- If a cancellation is received on Day 1, or you fail to attend any of the four days, CPPE reserves the right to retain the full course fee.
- Should you wish to appeal your cancellation charge, you can do so in writing. Your appeal will be reviewed by the cancellation team. CPPE reserves the right to waive the fee under certain circumstances.

What opportunities are available for work shadowing?

Many participants on our course are successful in finding work shadowing and work placement opportunities. A personal approach can be successful through existing networks of friends, colleagues, or former employers. If you are in the position of needing to build new networks, a good starting point is through [RPS In Your Area](#), your [local pharmaceutical committee](#) or local CPPE tutor network.

It may also be worth approaching pharmacies in your neighbourhood or intended work area to enquire about work shadowing opportunities. A well-presented CV and supporting letter combined with a personal approach can work, but bear in mind that busy pharmacies may not have the capacity to accommodate you.

I am struggling financially while I prepare to return to practice. Can I claim benefits?

Depending on your circumstances, you may be entitled to claim benefits. If you are or have been a registered pharmacist, Pharmacist Support can provide free, confidential telephone advice on benefits entitlement. If you have built up debts while you have not been working, Pharmacist Support can also provide free and confidential help from a debt adviser and may be able to provide financial assistance. For further information on benefits and debt advice, visit the Pharmacist Support website.

How can I meet the requirements for revalidation after my career break?

The General Pharmaceutical Council website has information on revalidation, including the standards, a framework for recording and frequently asked questions. In the review section there is information about what you need to submit if you have an incomplete revalidation record due to maternity leave or illness.

The RPS website has a section dedicated to revalidation with resources, case studies and frequently asked questions. Revalidation support and advice is also available from RPS support on 0845 257 2570 (Monday to Friday, 9:00am-5:00pm) or by emailing: support@rpharms.com

Returning to work

How do I apply for a job?

If you have not already done so, you should put together a CV which details your skills, knowledge, and experience. Don't forget that even if you haven't practised as a pharmacist or pharmacy technician for some time, you may have developed other skills, such as budgeting, negotiation or listening skills. You may also wish to describe your plans for updating your knowledge and skills and list any relevant courses you have attended.

You can find information on preparing a CV by visiting the [National Careers Service website](#).

How do I find out about jobs that are available?

Jobs may be advertised in the Pharmaceutical Journal or on the websites of multiple pharmacy groups. If you want to find out about jobs in primary care or in hospital pharmacy, the majority of these are advertised on the [NHS Jobs](#) website.

Do I need an NHS Smartcard?

You will need to have an NHS Smartcard to enable you to use the Electronic Prescription Service (EPS) and Summary Care Record (SCR).

You can obtain a Smartcard by applying to your local registration authority. The registration authority will ask you to provide at least three forms of identification, including proof of address and your General Pharmaceutical Council registration number. In some cases an employing pharmacy will be able to arrange this directly. Your local LPC will be able to advise on arrangements in your area.

I would like to work as a community locum pharmacist – where can I find out more about this?

The Royal Pharmaceutical Society produces a [reference guide](#) to working as a locum which is a good starting point for information. Many pharmacies only engage locums they know personally, so you should use local CPPE or RPS events as an opportunity to network.

It may be worth having business cards printed and paying a personal visit to pharmacies in your locality to drop them off.

There are several locum agencies which specialise in placements for pharmacists and pharmacy technicians. These can be easily found using an internet search. Your local LPC may also be able to advise.

Do I need to take a registration certificate with me when I work?

Registration certificates issued by RPSGB prior to 2010 are no longer valid, as the regulator is now General Pharmaceutical Council. To lawfully conduct a retail pharmacy business, a registered pharmacist must be in charge of the registered pharmacy as the responsible pharmacist. You are required to display a responsible pharmacist notice, which you can download from the General Pharmaceutical Council website. Some pharmacy systems can also be used to generate the responsible pharmacist notice.

Do I need personal indemnity insurance?

The General Pharmaceutical Council standards require registrants to ensure that all their work, or work for which they are responsible, is covered by appropriate professional indemnity cover.

Providers of indemnity insurance include the Pharmacists' Defence Association (PDA) and the National Pharmacy Association.

Where can I find information on tax and National Insurance?

Information on tax and National Insurance is available on the HM Revenue and Customs website. This is particularly important if you plan to be self-employed.

If I work as a locum, do I need sickness cover?

We cannot advise you on whether you require any particular type of cover, but policy providers include the Pharmaceutical and General Provident Society and CBG Group.

I have not worked as a pharmacist for a while and am anxious about returning to practice. Is there someone I could talk to?

If you are or have been a registered pharmacist, you might find it useful to contact Listening Friends. This is a free and confidential telephone service provided by Pharmacist Support and staffed by volunteer pharmacists. All the volunteers are trained in listening skills and dealing with people under stress. They are also all pharmacists, so they understand the pressures of the pharmacy profession. Contact Listening Friends on 0808 168 5133.

As a community pharmacist, what do I need to do to work in hospital pharmacy?

A good starting point for changing your sector of practice would be to find out more about hospital pharmacy by having a chat with a hospital pharmacist. They may also be able to assist you in identifying local opportunities for gaining experience in hospital pharmacy, such as work shadowing.