GUIDELINES
FOR THE
PHARM.D. STUDENT
ATTENDING
NATIONAL PHARMACY
MEETINGS

(A Survival Guide)

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These guidelines are provided as “helpful hints” to the Pharm.D. candidate so that he/she can have a productive national pharmacy meeting, especially when seeking employment. If you can think of anything that is not covered in the handout which you feel is important, please bring it to the attention of one of the authors so that we can continually provide the most updated and useful information to the next Pharm.D. class.

Considerations for hotel/airfare

1. Make a hotel reservation early. Desired hotels fill up quickly. Generally, you can cancel your reservation if you give sufficient notice if you change your mind later. For convention rates, you generally need to go through the convention hotel reservation bureau. On occasion, travel agencies, the hotel, and/or "unofficial" hotels may have even better rates, but realize that you would be in an "unofficial" room and may not receive important meetings notices and/or convenient convention mass transportation.

2. Find a hotel close to the convention center. Even though it may be more expensive, you can save money by not having to take a taxi and save time by not needing to use the convention-provided mass transit system. In addition, since you are interviewing, you can quickly go back to your room to take a nap and/or freshen up rather than spend the entire day at the convention center. This can help you present yourself better during the interview process.

3. Try to arrive early to the meeting (for ASHP Midyear, arrive on a Saturday). It will be easier to get a non-smoking room. It also may allow you to get a head start on the personnel placement service, when available.

4. Generally, airfare is cheaper with a Saturday night stay (It may be cheaper to spend the extra night in a hotel versus the more expensive airfare of leaving on a Sunday).

5. Make airline reservations relatively early (Easier to get the cheaper rates). If you have layovers, get an aisle seat during the first leg of the trip in order to change planes a bit more quickly. Also, if flying out west, consider getting a window seat during the last leg of the trip in order to enjoy the scenery.

Guidelines for the Convention

1. Sign up for the meeting early so you can get all the Pharmaceutical company mailings describing educational conferences. You may also save money on registration.
2. For ASHP, sign up for the personnel placement service early. You save money and also guarantee yourself a spot on the master list that goes out early to prospective employers.

3. Upon arrival to the convention city, check into your hotel and then go to the convention center to pick up your meeting registration packet. Next, get situated with the personnel placement service. First, go to your own mailbox and review what inquiries you have received. If you are interested in any of these opportunities, submit a return notice of interest to them. For those that you are not interested in, submit a professional letter of regrets. Next, submit your initial notices of interest into the mailboxes of prospective employers that have yet to first contact you. For sites that you have an extreme interest in, you may want to prepare a personalized letter of interest and include a resume or CV.

4. Student convention orientation sessions are often available early during the meeting. These sessions may help prepare you for the weeklong meeting. You also will have an opportunity to meet important individuals within the organization, some of whom may be able to assist you in finding employment.

5. If you are interested in attending an educational symposium, make sure you do not schedule an interview at the same time. Realize that some sessions become completely filled, so for the most popular sessions, plan on arriving at least 15 minutes early if you want a desirable seat (if a seat at all). The rooms are quite large, so sitting closer to the front allows you to see slides and overheads better. Be aware that some sessions given around lunch time that are sponsored by pharmaceutical companies may even give out “Free Food” coupons, but at the end of the session!!

6. In the evening, frequently there are several major social events sponsored by drug companies. Keep your eyes and ears open for these, as you often will need to obtain an invitation to enter; therefore, you need to find out where you can get such an invitation.

7. Remember, it’s a small world in Pharmacy so be careful what you say anywhere and everywhere (i.e., elevator, bus, restaurant, restrooms, shopping malls, etc.)…somebody or a friend of an important somebody may be listening.

8. Behave professionally!! Potential employees might see you at functions outside of the meeting.

9. Talk to faculty/advisors for ideas on how to prepare yourself for the meeting and for interviewing.
Interview Skills

1. Try to decide and limit what you are interested in doing after leaving Pharm.D. school and determine your goal or goals before arriving to the meeting. This will help you determine your interviewing plan. If you go to the meeting considering all possible opportunities, you will run yourself into the ground with all the interviewing. In addition, interviewers will pick up on the fact that you are not quite sure of what you want to do.

2. Review job listings prior to going to meeting and look for positions consistent with your goals. To assure that you receive the job listings prior to the meeting, register early for the placement service.

3. Develop a short resume on nice paper. Also, decide on potential references and make a list of these individuals. Remember to first ask permission of the individual. Realize that, for different positions, you may want to use different individuals as a reference. At least use some faculty. Interviewers will pick up on the fact that no faculty members are being used, thus making them suspicious of your qualities.

4. Take an appointment book (and use it) so that you don’t double-book appointments.

5. Record the names of people that you interview with so that you can write back to them and thank them for their time. In this follow-up letter, either state that you are interested in their position and “hope to hear from them in the future” or professionally state that you are not interested in their position.

6. Have items (CVs, resumes, etc.) that you want to present to interviewers in an easy-to-find place (so that you are not fumbling around in your folder).

7. Consider preparing business cards listing you as a Pharm.D. candidate.

8. Don’t go to the meeting with a pessimistic attitude that no one will be interested in you. You should be surprised. Many of you will receive several unsolicited inquiries.

9. At ASHP, communication in the personnel placement service is generally done through the use of mailboxes (which may change in the future). Both the interviewer and students have mailboxes in which to communicate back and forth to each other. There will be ASHP-provided slips for you to use and fill out. If you know of certain positions that you are interested in, it can be a good idea to create your own personalized communication letter prior to arriving to the meeting. This shows the prospective employer of your interest in them.
10. Develop a “brag book” that includes your clerkship preceptors’ evaluations of your performances and your presentation handouts. Generally, don’t pull this out unless prompted by the interviewer.

11. Make a list of questions you expect to be asked by the interviewers and develop answers prior to the meeting.

12. Make a list of your strengths and weaknesses. This should be what your various clerkship preceptors have told you during your rotations. A suggestion: When asked, “What is your strength?” word it as, “My preceptors have told me my strengths are…” Be careful of using the word “I.” When asked, “What are your weaknesses?”, try to answer in a positive sense and don’t be afraid to generalize here.

Another suggestion: At this point in time, your major weakness is probably clinical experience. If you are interviewing for a residency, you can make this weakness positive by stating that, “This is why I am pursuing a residency.”

13. Interviewing at conventions is generally a weeding out process. You will decide what programs most interest you and vice versa. Don’t be discouraged if you have not found anything definite by the time the meeting is over, rarely anyone will.

14. Don’t burn any bridges because it may come back to haunt you. Remember that pharmacy is a small world, especially clinical pharmacy. A place that does not interest you for a residency may interest you for a job later on.

15. Prioritize. Don’t feel obligated to interview with all and everyone who is interested in you. You’ll tire yourself out.

16. Try to interview the first half of the meeting. By the second half, both the interviewers and you will be ready to get out of town. A lot of interviewers actually leave town before the meeting is over.

17. Consider interviewing first with a site you are less interested in. This may allow you to gain experience and confidence when you interview with your more serious sites.

18. When available, take advantage of the residency showcases (which is separate from the personnel placement service at ASHP Midyear). At Midyear, these are available on Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday in the afternoon when the major exhibit hall is open. If you are interested in a specific residency, so up at the showcase, even if you have a scheduled formal interview with them later. The more they see you and the more people from that institution see you, the better an impression you can make and the more they will remember you. If a particular employer is having a hospitality function in the evening, also attend that for the same reasons.
19. Have faculty introduce you to people you are interested in that they know.

20. Be aware, if a perspective employer knows one of your own faculty, they will probably contact that faculty member and ask about you, even if you did not list that person as a reference.

21. Be able to recognize potentially nationally known individuals who may be interviewing you. If you know of a site you are interested in, you may want to do some homework on individuals associated with that institution.

22. Take along paper clips, stapler, and staple remover with you to assist you in “clipping” notes of interest to your CV.

23. Generally, there is a message board placed at locations throughout the convention area. You may want to review this board periodically for messages from prospective interviewers.

24. Recently, many interviewees have made early contact with potential interviewers using E-mail to set up appointments ahead of time. When E-mail addresses are listed in the job announcement bulletin you receive prior to the meeting or when you know of someone who will be interviewing at the meeting, you may want to take advantage of this early contact. A suggested message might be: “My name is Les Smith (Applicant #9999) and I am a Pharm.D. student interested in a residency position in pediatrics. I saw that you have listed such a position and I am hoping that we will be able to meet at the upcoming convention so that I could learn more of this position.”

25. When you return home from the meeting, consider writing thank-you notes to the institutions you interviewed with.
   a. For those sites you are NOT interested in, say that you are thankful for their time; but, at this point in your career, your goals are different from their mission and will not be pursuing their position at this time (but this keeps you in good favor if you have an interest with them in the future).
   b. For those sites you are definitely interested in, say that you are thankful for their time and:
      i. If you have no application, would appreciate being sent one; or,
      ii. If you have an application, state that an application will soon be forthcoming.

General Thoughts

1. Wash your hands frequently to attempt to avoid the “post-convention” common cold.

2. The days can be long. Keep this in mind as you plan your meals for the day. Realize you may have to spend a few extra dollars to eat at the convention center; but, this may be better than becoming hypoglycemic and ineffective during your interviews.
3. You will be doing a lot of walking, so wear comfortable shoes.

4. Do not be afraid to pick up additional pointers on how to survive national meetings from your faculty prior to you leaving for the meeting.

5. When requesting faculty to prepare letters of reference for you following the ASHP December meeting, realize that the deadline dates for many programs ranges from January 1st through the 15th. Therefore, to give faculty plenty of lead-time to prepare such letters and to send them in on time, approach faculty soon after arriving from ASHP. Waiting until after mid-December may place an unreasonable on faculty as they prepare for the Holidays or a December vacation. This is also the time they commonly are finalizing Fall Semester courses and preparing Spring Semester courses.