



Hospital pharmacy in Greece

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Next year, as Greek hospital pharmacists, we will celebrate the 30th birthday of our professional association, the Panhellenic Association of Hospital Pharmacists (PEFNI). Created in 1976 by inspired hospital pharmacists, PEFNI represents all pharmacists who work in public sector, general, psychiatric, and university hospitals. PEFNI promotes the hospital pharmacist as a health care professional who is actively involved in making decisions relating to patient care by integrating the medical and pharmacotherapeutic needs of patients with drug policy and pharmacoeconomics data. PEFNI also makes proposals for a more rational consumption and use of medical products. We have been publishing our own journal, Hospital Pharmacy Bulletin, since 1982.

Hospital pharmacy training

The only qualifications required for a pharmacist to get a job in a Greek hospital is a bachelor's degree in Pharmacy and permission to practice from the Ministry of Health. In the Hospital Pharmacy department, new pharmacists get the C grade. Hospital pharmacists are promoted to B and A grades with eight and ten years of practice, respectively, and to Director of a hospital pharmacy department after twelve years.

Prospective pharmacy students must pass a national entrance examination to gain admittance to one of three universities in Greece that have a Faculty of Pharmacy: Athens, Thessaloniki and Patras. During their five-year program, students must complete a one year practical training that includes six months in a community pharmacy, three months in a hospital pharmacy, and three months in either a community pharmacy, a hospital pharmacy, or in the pharmaceutical industry. Upon completing their degree, pharmacy students take the Pharmacy Board Examination, which must be passed

in order to receive permission to practice. Such permission is required to work in community or hospital pharmacies, or in any other position for organizations under the coverage of the Hellenic Ministry of Health. An optional master's degree typically takes four semesters and is comprised of course work, clinical practice, and research. A doctoral degree is also offered, requiring at least four additional semesters.

Greek hospital pharmacies

Greek hospitals wishing to have in-house pharmacies must receive authorization from the local health department and submit to an examination from a regional inspector. Once established, the pharmacy is granted an annual budget that pays for drugs, medical devices, and other pharmaceutical products, but not for salaries. The number of pharmacists per bed in Greek hospitals is quite low, typically only one or two in a medium hospital of 200 – 400 beds. This serious shortage of personnel (and software too) means that, even though prescriptions should ideally be analysed by the hospital pharmacist and dispensed in unit doses, drugs are still distributed in bulk in many hospitals, based on lists of orders from the wards.

Greek hospital pharmacies purchase drugs for hospitalised patients, outpatients under special pharmacotherapy such as cancer treatment, and indigent patients covered by Social Security. Indigent patients can only receive their drugs free of charge directly from hospital pharmacies. Drug pricing in hospital pharmacies is different from that in community pharmacies, resulting from consultations made by the Ministries of Health and Commerce with the pharmaceutical industries.

Roles of the hospital pharmacist

Greek hospital pharmacists are integral to ensuring high standards of care for hospital patients and so must often juggle many

responsibilities simultaneously. We are obligated to handle the purchase, management, and dispensing of all sterile products, medical devices and disposables. Greek hospital pharmacists must also manufacture drug preparations that are not available from pharmaceutical companies, including TPN, reagents and chemical substances for laboratories, and various sanitary materials for the wards. We also manage hospital drug policy by being members of the hospital's Drug and Therapeutic Committee (DTC).

Research, politics, and teaching are also part of the job. Pharmacists can be involved in pharmaco-economic studies or take part in research in collaboration with the DTC, the various committees that it is involved with, or through its own internal projects. By law, we also belong to the Hospital Infections Committee, which may influence the antibiotics policy in the hospital. Many Greek hospitals are responsible for the local nursing schools. In such instances, hospital pharmacists teach Clinical Pharmacology to the second year nursing students, a task requiring 62 hours of instruction per year.

All told, Greece's approximately 320 hospital pharmacists work hard to contribute to a high standard of health care in our country. While we hope you will never have the need to visit us, we'll be ready if you do.

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