

Pharmacy Residency Frequently Asked Questions

Why did you select the Columbia VA? What makes your program unique?

Cassie Banks, PGY1: I wasn't sure I wanted to complete a residency within the VA until after I had a rotation at the Community-Based Outpatient Clinic (CBOC) in Greenville, SC, which is within the Columbia VA. I was able to learn from phenomenal pharmacists and grow significantly in my knowledge base and confidence during my rotation month. I realized that the quality of preceptors and mentors that I would have as a resident in this program would directly influence my own development as a pharmacist and preceptor. As a resident here now, I can attest to the fact that this program contains a wealth of opportunity to learn under dedicated preceptors with a talent for teaching. The learning environment here is incredibly unique.



Ashton Holley, PGY2 Psychiatry: When applying to PGY1 residency programs, I knew that I wanted to complete residency within the VA system. During my PGY1 year, I fell in love with the work environment, patient population, and having the ability to help manage multiple different disease states that are seen within the Veteran population. When applying for PGY2 programs, I knew that I wanted to stay within the VA. I was interested in this program specifically because of the interactions that I had with both residency leadership and residents at the time. Each time I spoke with them, I never wanted the conversation to end. I wanted to know more about them personally and professionally and could feel like they had those interests in me as well which I think is a valuable quality that this program has.



What has been your favorite rotation so far?

Alex Waddell, PGY2 Ambulatory Care: Although we have a variety of rotations, my favorite one has been in the primary care arena. We have a variety of Patient Aligned Care Teams (PACT) where pharmacists are able to address chronic disease states. Primary care allows residents the opportunity to become stronger in chronic disease state management (such as diabetes, hypertension, hyperlipidemia, and even gout) while building positive relations with veterans, their families, and other VA staff. In PACT you can make a direct impact on patient quality of life and well-being while ensuring continuity of care. I believe these experiences are valuable for all residents regardless of their plans for the future.



What support is provided to residents? Are residents assigned a mentor?

Bethany McAlhany, PGY1: There is a lot of support offered throughout residency! You are assigned a general mentor to be with you throughout the year. You also get assigned a mentor for all your projects (topic discussion, research, medication use evaluation). In addition, you will get a non-VA mentor through the Clinical Teaching Certificate program at the University of South Carolina College of Pharmacy. Lastly, throughout your rotations each month you will have various preceptors and they all act as mentors for you as well. You have many opportunities to find someone you can connect with!



What do residents do outside the program?

Haley Larreur, PGY1: Outside of residency, I spend my time with friends, traveling, cooking/baking, and exploring new things to do in Columbia. I also enjoy getting the opportunity to exercise, read a book, or do something to get my mind off of residency while also being active. Sometimes sleeping in and having a lazy day (on the weekends, of course) is all you need, but relaxation comes in different forms for everyone. I suggest finding the things that make you happiest and indulging in those while away from residency to clear your mind,



What leadership opportunities are available to residents?

Bethany McAlhany, PGY1: Residents are assigned a leadership month at least once throughout the year (PGY1s have 3 months each this year). During these months you will create meeting agendas, lead meetings, and prepare meeting minutes. Meetings include weekly resident meetings, monthly Clinical Pharmacy Service (CPS) meetings, monthly PBM meetings, and a monthly New Provider Orientation (NPO) presentation. These responsibilities are on top of your typical daily responsibilities for the rotation that you are on.



What teaching and/or precepting opportunities are available in your program?

Cassie Banks, PGY1: As part of the longitudinal requirements for residency, PGY1 residents will complete the Clinical Teaching Certificate program through the University of South Carolina College of Pharmacy. Through this program, you can choose either the Preceptor or Academician track, and residents will give lecture presentations, grade assignments, and precept students on rotations throughout the year. PGY1 residents will also present an interactive topic discussion to students each month on topics such as diabetes, hypertension, pain, and COPD. Any incoming PGY2 residents who do not already have a teaching certificate can complete the program as well if they are interested, which is a great opportunity to gain additional precepting skills.



Taylor Ellison, PGY2 Psychiatry: During my PGY1 residency, I completed a teaching certificate program offered through the University of Georgia College of Pharmacy. As a PGY2 resident, I have the opportunity to precept a pharmacy resident during my inpatient psychiatry rotation. In addition to precepting a pharmacy resident, I am able to precept a pharmacy student during my MHICM elective rotation. My role as a preceptor will include activities such as leading topic discussions, patient documentation and counseling, and participating in journal clubs. I will have the chance to apply the four types of preceptor roles (instructing, modeling, coaching, and facilitating) and provide performance feedback to the pharmacy resident and student as they progress. I am grateful for the opportunity to facilitate meaningful learning and hone my skills as a preceptor.



How is the Columbia VA handling COVID-19 regarding the residency experience?

Leah Korte, PGY1: Inpatient rotations are largely unaffected when it comes to seeing COVID negative patients. The teams still round on their patients and typically discuss the patient cases in person. No pharmacy residents ever have a need to go into the room of a COVID positive patient during rounds, so that is really the only exception. For outpatient rotations, it really depends on the site. Many of the clinics are still seeing patients virtually so we are doing video and telephone visits from the resident office, but face-to-face visits have been increasing. There is also the option of working in-person at the clinic, but still having virtual visits. Residents are provided with a new surgical mask every day.



What are the staffing requirements at the Columbia VA? What duties are you responsible for while staffing?



Taylor Ellison, PGY2 Psychiatry: All residents are expected to staff in the outpatient pharmacy every 3rd or 4th weekend depending on the number of residents. The PGY1 residents additionally staff every 3rd or 4th Friday evening (5 – 9pm). The Friday evening shift is optional for PGY2 residents. During the weekend staffing, there are two tours (8am – 4:30pm and 12:30 – 9pm). The duties during these staffing shifts include performing medication reconciliation upon patient admission and discharge, medication counseling, and processing and dispensing outpatient medications for patients discharged from the emergency department.

What is your favorite thing about the program?

Leah Korte, PGY1: My favorite thing about the Columbia VA is how kind and supportive everyone is. Wherever you go, whoever you are working with, you will be surrounded by people who care for your wellbeing and your success, as well as the wellbeing of your patients. You are never alone, whether you are on rotation or staffing. Preceptors ask about your experience level and expectations prior to the rotation and work with you to tailor the rotation to what suits your future plans the best. There's also plenty of opportunities to get to know your co-residents better and you quickly form a supportive family together.



Alex Waddell, PGY2 Ambulatory Care: My favorite thing about the Columbia VA is the support we have from our RPDs, preceptors, and mentors. They aim to guide residents into competent, well-rounded pharmacists and make a point to tailor your experiences and rotations to your interest areas while pushing you to continue to become stronger in both clinical and interpersonal skills. In addition, our mentors here are a great sounding board for rotation projects and other opportunities. I believe that the supportive atmosphere that our program provides creates an environment where residents can truly flourish.



What are your favorite things to do in Columbia?

Haley Larreur, PGY1: Columbia is such a fun little city that always has something to offer. In the downtown area, there are many fun and new restaurants, a museum, you can tour the statehouse, or just walk and explore all the historic sites on the UofSC campus and around town. On Saturdays, there is a farmer's market called Soda City on Main Street, where vendors from all over the state come to sell their items whether it be art, food, coffee, clothes, jewelry, pet items, flowers, candles, etc. During football season (Go Gamecocks!), you can tailgate, attend games, and fully immerse yourself in gamecock country. We also have a city baseball team called the Fireflies, and those games are always fun to attend as well. There are many breweries and restaurants in Columbia and the surrounding cities with wonderful brunch, lunch and dinner menus of all cuisines. If you're an animal lover, the Riverbanks Zoo is nearby. There is a mall with many other stores in Irmo if you like to shop. Irmo is also where Lake Murray is located, where you can go out on a boat or swim at the public "beaches". There is also the Riverwalk Park here in Columbia, where you can walk, run, or picnic by the water. You can even go tubing down the river with some friends if you're feeling brave!



Ashton Holley, PGY2 Psychiatry: There are so many great things to do in Columbia! I grew up around the area and went to pharmacy school here, so I am familiar with all the fun things Columbia has to offer. Some of my favorite things to do include going to brunch, checking out breweries, and boating on Lake Murray. Also, I enjoy attending college football games with UofSC being here in town and Fireflies games, which is our minor league baseball team. No matter your interest, there are so many things to do and explore here in Columbia.





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