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CHASING A DREAM FELLOWSHIP AFTER PHARM.D

My name is Carmen Witsken and I graduated with my PharmD from The University of Findlay in May 2021. I am currently one year into my two-year Executive Fellowship in Association Leadership and Management at The American Society of Consultant Pharmacists (ASCP)! I work within all departments in the Society, but have a concentration in government and legislative affairs, regulatory affairs, and pharmacy practice. I've included my perspective on common questions that I receive about fellowships as a whole and my personal experience so far in my role. My goal is to show another possible pathway for PharmD graduates and help you to decide if this a career path you'd be interested in!

If you have any questions or would like to reach out, please email me at cwitsken@ascp.com.

What made you decide to pursue a fellowship?

During my third year of school, I tried to imagine myself in the various pharmacy settings that I had seen through IPPE rotations so far and work in a hospital. Although I enjoyed aspects of every experience I had, I realized that I didn't see myself in any of the settings for a long time. I wanted a position where each day was different, and I could work on long-term projects that I was passionate about alongside my daily tasks. This realization inspired me to start looking for areas in pharmacy outside of the traditional and to ask others about their career paths!

I was able to connect to many pharmacists through Alpha Zeta Omega (AZΩ) Pharmaceutical Fraternity who worked a variety of settings I hadn't

seen yet, such as research, medical writing, regulatory affairs, consulting, and administration, just to name a few! Throughout my last three years of school, I reached out to alumni from my school and pharmacists on LinkedIn who were in pharmacist roles that interested me. I used their tips and advice to guide my IPPE and APPE selections and eventually, my decision to pursue a fellowship!

What experiences prepared you well for your fellowship?

I believe that a variety of experiences through on-campus clubs prepared me the most for a fellowship! I served on the leadership of Findlay's local chapters of the Student National Pharmaceutical Association (SNPhA), Alpha Zeta Omega (AZΩ) Pharmaceutical Fraternity, and Gerontology Club. These experiences taught me how to work alongside many different personalities and work towards a common goal, no matter if we differed on opinions on how to get there. These experiences have directly helped me effectively and meaningfully contribute to many different coalitions and committees while representing ASCP. They also showed me what leadership styles work and don't work in certain settings and have helped to guide me as I figure out what type of leader I want to be!

Quality is more important than quantity when it comes to participation in organizations during college. Make sure you join organizations that you are truly interested in and are willing to put time aside for. Having meaningful experiences from these opportunities is so much more helpful for you rather than having a list of organizations on your CV that you can't speak on!

What made you choose the fellowship with ASCP?

Throughout the summer and fall of my APPE rotations, I kept an eye on all the types of PharmD fellowships available. I came across a lot of roles that I could see myself enjoying part or some part of the role, but not all of it. I was interested in and excited about all parts of the fellowship role with ASCP, especially because I have always been interested in geriatrics, making the application and interview processes so much easier and natural! It sounds simple enough, but make sure you are looking for a role that suits you, rather than trying to fit yourself into a role that doesn't suit your interests.



Can you give a brief overview of your role, its structure and value within the Society?

As the Executive Fellow, I support ASCP's government affairs portfolio by monitoring, tracking, and researching legislative and regulatory policies that affect senior care pharmacy practice. I also attend congressional hearings and meeting with policymakers, regulators, and other stakeholders to advocate for ASCP priorities! Some of the hot button topics that I've been working on are the appropriate use of antipsychotics (Project PAUSE), COVID-19 monoclonal antibody and antiviral therapy access, administration, and reimbursement, and pharmacy health information technology (PHIT).

I also work directly with our pharmacist members and Board of Directors through internal ASCP committees and external coalitions, providing me with great experiences with project management through assisting them with reaching their charges! So far, I have led and assisted with many projects within our Student & New Practitioner Workgroup, Antimicrobial Stewardship and Infection and Prevention Control Committee, Opioid Stewardship Workgroup, and Justice, Equity, Diversity, & Inclusion (JEDI) Task Force.

Another large part of my role is serving as the primary APPE preceptor for ASCP. I believe this part of my role is important, as students are the future of the profession! I've enjoyed introducing students to the worlds of senior care pharmacy and association work. I've been really inspired by the variety of passions students have and watching them flourish in experiences that are out of their comfort zones!

What has been the most beneficial part of the fellowship? Hardest part?

So far, the most beneficial part of my fellowship has been learning how to analyze issues, develop arguments, and effectively communicate with stakeholders. I am very grateful to have role models from all departments at ASCP who have taken me under their wing and shown me what great leaders look like!

The hardest part of my fellowship has been adjusting from the environment of school where I could focus on just a few responsibilities at a time! I've had to improve my organizational skills to be more flexible, as much of what we work on are long-haul projects that don't see immediate results. I've learned the importance of prioritization based on the goals of ASCP and breaking up large (and overwhelming) projects into small, manageable pieces.

Further Reading:

1. [The Importance of Getting Involved in Professional Pharmacy Associations During Pharmacy School](#)
2. [A27 Snippets- A Clear Path to Industry \(Fellowship Application and Interview Tips\)](#)
3. [First, Break All the Rules](#)