

P. Zach White PharmD



Finding Your Passion and Pursuing It with Vigor

Zach thought he was destined for retail pharmacy practice until he encountered his first PharmD advanced pharmacy practice experience (APPE) rotation in the neonatal intensive care unit (NICU). This experience transformed his life and career goals, leading him to find his career passion for pediatrics and neonatology. His pediatric expertise comes into play at home as he and his wife Amber raise two young children, Daxton (age 4) and Connor (age 1).

Zach is a clinical pharmacist in the NICU at Intermountain Healthcare's Utah Valley Hospital. He is the Women and Children's Pharmacy Team Lead, assisting in managing five pharmacists and one technician. He sits on three pediatric interdisciplinary committees, which make decisions for 22 Intermountain hospitals and 180 clinics. Zach received his PharmD from the University of Utah and completed a postgraduate year 1 (PGY1) residency at Mayo Eugenio Litta Children's Hospital in Rochester, Minnesota.

Zach's advice is: ***Follow your passion and build on professional relationships. Passion provides the direction, and your professional relationships will lift you to where you want to be.***

Dear Pharmacy Colleague,

If you would have told me three-and-a-half years ago that I would be an inpatient pharmacist in a NICU, I would have replied that you are as crazy as Britney Spears was in 2007. My limited pharmacy experience and career path were founded completely in retail pharmacy. I had a strong interest in pediatrics, but a stronger interest in *not* doing a residency.



A railroad switch is a mechanical installation on the railroad track that allows a train to switch its course from the current track onto a new track. Stories have been shared about

trains that were unintentionally left on a track, or inadvertently switched to a new track, arriving at train stations hundreds of miles from the intended destination. I feel that a railroad switch is the most appropriate analogy for my professional career plans between my last year of pharmacy school and today. Over the course of two years, I hit three major “switches” that changed my career course. These switches landed me in a metaphorical Chicago, instead of Atlanta.

THE FIRST SWITCH: RETAIL OR INPATIENT

In selecting your student and resident rotations, consider expanding beyond your comfort zone. The world of pharmacy is vast, and you might be pleasantly surprised when a new passion ignites.

I worked as a paid intern at a popular retail pharmacy chain during my last two-and-a-half years of pharmacy school. In selecting my APPE rotations, my approach was to choose as many pharmacy experiences as possible outside of retail pharmacy, as I figured I would have my entire career to become proficient in retail.

My first APPE opportunity was offered in the University of Utah Hospital NICU. I actually googled what NICU meant; because pediatrics was a strong interest, I jumped at the opportunity. Although my education was clinically focused, I did not have any clinical experience. For the entirety of the six-week rotation, I was overwhelmed and felt that I was always three feet underwater.

Despite the feeling of drowning, I found myself excited to come in each day to help the tiniest of patients. My incredible preceptor recognized my effort and, despite my rookie status, diligently spent much time mentoring me in all ways clinical. Additionally, we discussed his path through pharmacy school and residency and developed a similar plan for myself. Because I communicated my newfound passion for neonatology and put considerable effort into the rotation, my former preceptor contacted me to apply for a NICU clinical pharmacist position when it became available. My advice for you is to *consider each day on rotation like a job interview*. You never know when one of your preceptors will think of you for a job opportunity.

It took less than a week to realize that being a NICU pharmacist would be much more enjoyable for me than a job in retail pharmacy. I appreciated the dosing challenges and the variant pharmacokinetic profiles. There were disease states that I had never learned about, and the clinical decisions are often based on clinical judgment, as the literature in this population is often lacking. It took only two days on the rotation for my wife to notice how happy I was. “I can’t believe how much happier you are—you must love it!” I replied that this would probably mean we would need to pursue residency training. Pursuing residency would drastically cut into our family time, which was extremely important to us. Her reply was: “If it is one or two extra years for you to be this happy, then it will be worth it in the long run, right?”

She was right.