Hello and welcome to the U.S. Department of Labor’s Podcast Series on Allied Health Occupations for Young Adults. My name is Sara Hastings and I will be the host of this podcast series. The allied health field has great promise for employing young adults served by the workforce system. Understanding more about specific occupations in allied health is really the first step in determining what the opportunities are in the field. This podcast series highlights young adults who are in training or who have been trained and are currently working in different allied health occupations. These young adults will discuss how they chose to enter this occupation, what kind of training they needed and what type of work or continued training or education they plan to do in the future. This series provides practical information about allied health occupations in order to assist both young adults and workforce staff in developing a career plan.

So today we’re going to be talking with Eduardo Montero. Eduardo is a Pharmacy Technician who recently finished the Springfield WIA Youth Program funded through the Lane Workforce Partnership in Eugene, Oregon.

Eduardo, thank you for talking with us today.

No problem.

So, why don’t you start off by telling us a little bit about yourself and about how you ended up becoming a pharmacy tech?

Well my name is Eduardo Montero and I am currently 20 years old. I finished my high school back in June 2009. I’ve been working since I was 16 but usually little summer jobs I would get with a friend or family member, things like that, and it was always hard work out in the sun and I figured I didn’t want to do anything like that for the rest of my life.

I found the WIA program in my senior year of high school. By October 2008 I was accepted into the program and I was placed as an interpreter at Volunteers in Medicine Clinic. I worked as an interpreter for about 8 months for 8 hours a week. In June 2009 when I was done with school I wanted to work in the dispensary since I had just done my last minute job shadow there and I thought it would be something good to learn. A dispensary is kind of like a pharmacy without a pharmacist on hand. I did that for about 6 months and in January of 2010 I was hired as a dispensary coordinator.

That’s great. So, if I wanted to become a pharmacy technician, what kind of training would I need? Can you tell us a little bit about what your program was like and how you ended up being a pharmacy tech?

To be a nationally certified pharmacy tech you need to at least have a high school diploma or GED. You also need to be at least 18 years old or older and pass a test to get your certification. I know a lot of people who actually take a class that is offered in some colleges but if you feel you’re ready for it you won’t need it. Usually you can do this as an on the job experience and just take the test. I learned on the job and studied Mosby’s pharmacy technician certification examination book for a couple days. I learned enough working that I didn’t really need anything else.

That’s great! Well, congratulations on becoming employed. So, can you tell us, what is a pharmacy technician?

A pharmacy tech is someone who assists the pharmacist in making sure the pharmacy runs well. A pharmacy tech will take a prescription from a patient when they drop it off, put information into the computer to have correct and accurate information about the patient. A tech will also fill meds in the computer and decipher what the doctors wrote on the prescription using sig codes. Sig codes are just Latin based words doctors use to put directions on how the patient is to take the medication. I would say this can be the hardest part of the job sometimes since some doctors just have horrible handwriting and it can just look like scribbles. Once the medication is in the computer either the pharmacist or tech will count pills or grab the right solutions and the pharmacist will make sure everything is right in the labels the tech printed when putting info into the computer. The patient has to get exactly what the doctor ordered. The tech will also deal with insurance companies for the patients that have health insurance.

Wow, it sounds like pharmacy techs do a lot. So, for you, what would a typical day on the job look like?

I work at a volunteer based clinic with probably only 20 paid staff. Everything we do in the clinic wouldn’t be achieved if there were no people who volunteered their time at least once a week. In the dispensary there are 4 positions total. We have a window tech which has the most patient contact than anyone else and they will take a prescription the patient just brought in from seeing one of the doctors at the clinic. Sometimes a patient will just go and ask for their refills if they are in the neighborhood. Window tech will also sign out all the prescriptions going out so we can have a log in case a patient ever says they didn’t get the medication or things of that nature. We also have a support tech which takes all the messages off left by patients wanting refills or just questions regarding their meds. A support tech will also work on the process request from all outside pharmacies including Wal-Mart, Bi-Mart, Safeway, Walgreens, Costco etc. when we don’t have a certain drug, a patient will have to go buy it but usually that’s for controlled substances which we don’t carry at our clinic. Next there is a computer tech who actually reads the prescription like a tech and puts it into the computer. When it’s done a label will be printed and the lead, either a licensed nurse, nationally certified pharmacy tech and sometimes even volunteers such as retired pharmacists and doctors will check the prescription to the label and get it ready for the patient. On new drugs for the patient a lead will counsel them on how to take it and things to avoid if any and things like that. Depending on who shows up or not, I can be doing any of those positions, maybe more than one. Whenever we get a new volunteer I will also be the one training them in the positions they will be doing.

Wow, that’s great! So, what do you like most about being a pharmacy technician?

I really like the fact that in a clinical setting working in the pharmacy you get a lot of patient, doctor, nurse interaction. All of this adds to what I learn, I not only learn things about pharmacy but of other careers as well. Lots of volunteers are also pre-med students so I get to work with a lot of very bright people and we mutually learn from each other. Every day is a learning experience and I love it. In the pharmacy there is also a lot of humor. Situations range so much in a pharmacy that every day is a fun day.

Well, that’s great. It’s nice to have a little bit of fun when you’re at work. So, what are your plans for the future?​

For the future I plan on being an actual pharmacist. Currently I am taking classes at a community college building up my GPA and taking as many pre requisites as I can. After that I will go to a 4 year college and finish getting a bachelors and pre requisites that are not available at a community college. During my last year of getting my bachelor’s degree I will start applying at pharmacy schools, most likely Oregon State University where I will do 3 more years of school and learn how to be a pharmacist. Last year will be just internships all around in different pharmacy settings. One of those settings on your rotations is helping the underserved community so that is how I actually meet a lot of the pharmacy students from OSU on their final year when they do their rotation to work in the dispensary. I learn a lot from them and that keeps me motivated to just keep doing what I’m doing. Usually they have jobs lined up when they are done with all their schooling so I feel like I won’t worry about looking for a job after all that schooling. Pharmacist and pharmacy techs are jobs in high demand. I feel there is just no way I can’t be a pharmacist. Goals are in my grasp and it’s just about how focused I stay.

Well, that all sounds really great. Good luck with everything in your future and with all of your schooling. Thanks so much for taking the time to talk with us today and we really appreciate hearing from you.

No problem.

To learn more about occupations in allied health, visit [www.careeronestop.org](http://www.careeronestop.org/), Just click on “explore careers”, then “browse” and you can search for any allied health occupation you’re interested in. The website gives you a ton of great information about the tasks and activities you’ll perform in a job, what sort of skills and requirements are needed, and what the wages and employment trends look like in your state. Again. That’s [www.careeronestop.org](http://www.careeronestop.org)

Well, I hope this information was helpful to you in your search to finding the right career. Thanks for listening today. Goodbye.