

United States Penitentiary, Leavenworth, Kansas

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When choosing rotations I was told “do something you think you never thought you would do” and “be sure to pick challenging rotations”. As I was looking at the list of available rotations, one caught my eye - U.S. Penitentiary, Leavenworth. “What could a pharmacist possibly do at a federal prison?” I thought to myself. This rotation had to be challenging and it definitely fit the description of something I never thought I would do, even in my wildest dreams. With the encouragement of family and friends I decided to sign up for this rotation.

Leavenworth, Kansas is a relatively quiet city on the Missouri River. The penitentiary first housed inmates in 1903 and took about 25 years for construction to be complete. It has housed some very infamous prisoners including Machine Gun Kelly, Robert Stroud (The Birdman of Alcatraz), and Thomas Silverstein who is regarded as one of the most dangerous prisoners in history and was held on a no human contact status. Recently, the prison’s mission has changed from maximum security to medium security.

The United States Public Health Service (PHS) staffs each federal prison in the United States with pharmacists. This section of the PHS is known as the Bureau of Prisons. The PHS also encompasses pharmacists serving within the Indian Health Service and the FDA.

When people hear that I was on rotation at Leavenworth, their first question is, “Did you see any prisoners?” Absolutely. One of my main duties was the distribution of medication to inmates at “pill line.” This is the scheduled time when inmates are to receive their medication. Security precautions were always taken. For example, I was never left by myself with an inmate and someone was aware of my whereabouts at all times. Dispensing is a big part of pharmacy in the penitentiary. Many of the medications are put in unit dose packages, some are given seven week supplies, and others are given 30 day supplies depending on individual inmate behavior and status. Inmates are constantly monitored for compliance. If they become noncompliant there are consequences such as being transferred to the Segregated Housing Unit (SHU). The SHU entails a 23 hour lock-down in their cell. Pharmacists at the Penitentiary are also responsible for recommending medications to the providers who have questions. Often times, the providers have questions regarding antibiotic coverage need clarification

about which medications are on the strict formulary. Pharmacists then recommend a reasonable drug to cover the provider's diagnosis.

The most unique experience I had was sitting in on the New Madrid Earthquake Disaster Response Team simulation. This was an exercise in which different officers in the Public Health Service come together and simulate a disaster response. They would be deployed by the federal government and provide different healthcare related services. The team finds hospitals, surgical units, medication, etc. to provide to those in need. The highlight was meeting Admiral John Babb who is the highest ranking pharmacist in the Public Health Service.

I would strongly encourage students to consider a rotation at Leavenworth. It is a very unique environment and experience. Others to consider might include a rotation within the PHS system or with the FDA. Pharmacists that are a part of PHS are very unique individuals and they typically participate in ways that extend beyond their direct responsibilities, such as serving on committees and teams for the government. I truly appreciate and value my experience at this site.