

Community Health Center

Background

Community health center (CHC) pharmacists play an important role in providing needed health care services and information to the underserved. These pharmacists fulfill the medication and information needs of patients in an outpatient setting and advise health care professionals working with outpatients at CHCs and clinics. Working with a broad range of patient ages and disease states, these pharmacists typically have full access to medical records. In addition, direct patient care is seen as a very strong component in many of the practice environments. The scope of practice and responsibilities in CHCs varies significantly by individual location. Pharmacists can be in a CHC with or without a dispensing component.

CHC pharmacists have diverse responsibilities in the health care system. Thirty-four percent of their time is spent dispensing medications (including the associated patient counseling). An additional 17% is spent on business and department management, followed by 13% for patient care services (e.g., medication therapy management, disease management), and 6% for personnel management.

Pharmacists in these settings also conduct wellness and preventive health programs. Some states allow CHC pharmacists to serve as primary care providers working within collaborative practice agreements with physicians following agreed upon protocols. This type of protocol may include prescribing authority. One pharmacist from New Mexico commented that students and other practitioners interested in CHC pharmacy should understand that “working in community health is rewarding and meaningful—there are opportunities to really impact the quality of care patients receive.”

Characteristics

Fifty-three CHC pharmacists responded to the 2007 *APhA Career Pathway Evaluation Program* survey. Forty-five percent of respondents held an entry-level pharmacy degree, and 39% held PharmD degrees. Ten percent indicated an advanced degree (MA, MS, MBS PhD, or other). Fifteen percent had been through a residency program, 15% had been through a certificate training program, and 11% reported having been through some form of other training.

Respondents' average age was 47 years old. Just over half (53%) of respondents were female. Eighty-three percent indicated some type of management role. Income data show just over half (59%) earn between \$80,000–\$100,000, while 41% earn \$100,000 or more per year. The average time worked per week was 41.6 hours. Respondents represented 21 states.

An overwhelming majority of respondents indicated that they were satisfied with their work, with 72% indicating “extremely satisfied” and 26% indicating “somewhat satisfied.” Similarly, most respondents indicated that they felt the work was quite challenging, with 49% indicating “extremely challenging” and 45% indicating “somewhat challenging.”

Insider's Perspective

What aspects of the job are most appealing?

Owing to the variety of work environments, duties, and responsibilities, the most appealing aspects of the role vary with the setting. Twenty-eight percent equally indicated that “counseling patients” and “direct patient care” were the two most appealing aspects of their work. A smaller percentage (13%) indicated that working with a health care team was the most appealing.

A respondent from West Virginia expressed enjoyment in the “team approach to practice, interaction with physicians, feeling valued as a member of the health care team.” Another respondent from Kentucky enjoyed the “ability to help patients get care they need but sometimes cannot afford.”

What aspects of the job are least appealing?

Competing for scarce resources was listed by 13% of the respondents as one of the least appealing aspects of their work. One respondent from Illinois wrote of concern for “dealing with insufficient grant monies to further the missions of our CHC.” An additional 10% indicated that administrative and regulatory duties are the least appealing aspects they encounter.

Six percent also cited language barriers and paperwork as two additional areas that are of concern. One respondent from Alabama indicated “time needed for paperwork for JCAHO.”

Several respondents also stated general concerns about the physical space for the pharmacy within the center as well as inadequate space for patient counseling and care.

What advice should students and practitioners consider when selecting the option of becoming a CHC pharmacist?

One theme was repeated by respondents about their career choice: 10% asked that students and practitioners be open to the idea of working in a CHC. Many advised visiting a variety of centers to see how different they are. In addition, respondents commented on the “clinical nature” of the practice, the ability to use “communication skills,” and the ability to “contribute to knowledge of patients.”

One respondent from Texas captured what many were indicating: “Give CHC a chance—it can be so rewarding! Patients are so appreciative of even the smallest things.” Another respondent from Arizona liked having “prescriptive authority.”

Helping People

Patient counseling is one of the most appealing aspects of CHC pharmacy. There are many pharmacists who cite helping people as the primary factor for choosing pharmacy as a career. As with the previous “people” categories, helping people ranked high with a 7.3, showing that the pharmacists who responded feel they have a positive effect on the overall care of their patients in a direct way. A respondent from Iowa summed up the thoughts of many others indicating “daily opportunity to directly make a positive impact on someone’s health.”

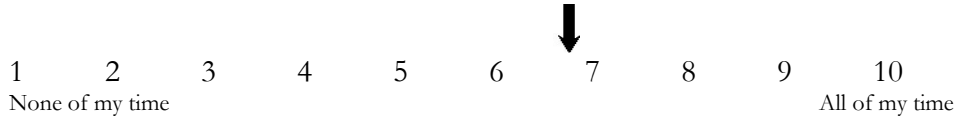
= 7.3
 $\sigma = 2.2$



Collaboration With Other Professionals

As mentioned previously, some respondents indicated that one of the most appealing aspects is interacting with other providers. One pharmacist from Wyoming found “the work environment and the ability to collaborate with physicians” to be enjoyable. A Washington pharmacist stated having “personal relationships with all members of the health care team (e.g., MD, PA, RN, lab [workers]).”

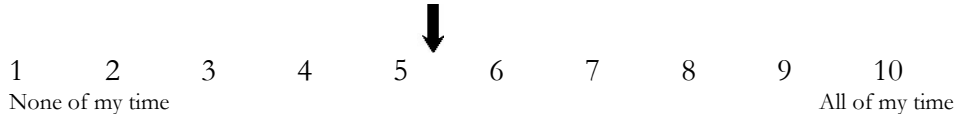
= 6.8
 $\sigma = 2.1$



Educating Other Professionals

CHC pharmacy is an outstanding setting for pharmacists to work side-by-side with other health care professionals. CHC pharmacists can educate other professionals on medication use, improving adherence, and effective therapies. The following non-inclusive list provides an example of the areas that respondents work in or with: oncology, HIV, diabetes, smoking cessation, and sexually transmitted diseases.

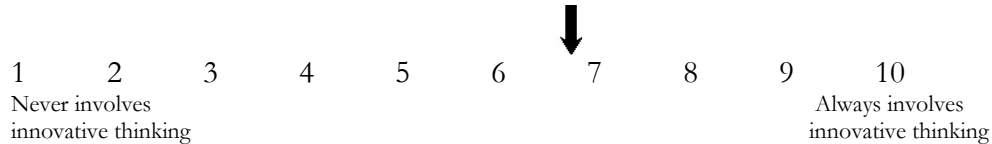
= 5.2
 $\sigma = 2.5$



Innovative Thinking

Some specialty practice settings are well established and have well-defined expectations, duties, and responsibilities, whereas others will require innovative thinking to help shape and define the specialty practice. In response to the question, “To what extent does your practice involve generating new ideas (innovative thinking) pertaining to pharmacy?”, CHC respondents average a 6.8 response indicating that their practice can provide the opportunity to test new and innovative approaches to drug therapy management or other issues encountered.

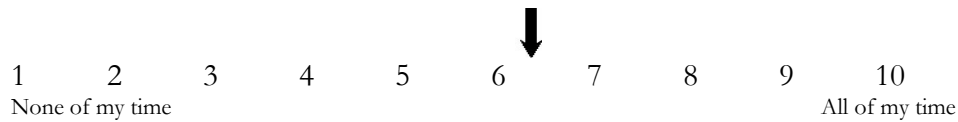
= 6.8
 $\sigma = 1.9$



Applying Scientific Knowledge

Applying scientific knowledge received a relatively high score of 6.3.

= 6.3
 $\sigma = 2.3$



Applying Medical Knowledge

Respondents spend an even greater proportion of their time applying medical knowledge in their field. Roles that apply this knowledge can include patient counseling, physical assessment, drug therapy reviews, and collaboration with other professionals.

= 7.6
 $\sigma = 1.9$



Creating New Knowledge by Conducting Research

CHC pharmacy is an example of a setting designed for the application of knowledge. The results of pharmaceutical research and studies are used to improve patient outcomes by means of protocol development. Limited opportunities exist to conduct extensive research in the pharmacy setting. However, for the most part, this setting is where knowledge is applied and used within specific drug therapy protocols, reflected by the 2.7 rating.

= 2.7
 $\sigma = 1.9$



Management/Supervision of Others

In CHC pharmacy, the majority of management or supervisory tasks are the responsibility of the pharmacy manager. In many settings, the pharmacists are responsible for the conduct and practice in the pharmacy, and they must supervise a variety of pharmacy and, in some cases, nursing personnel.

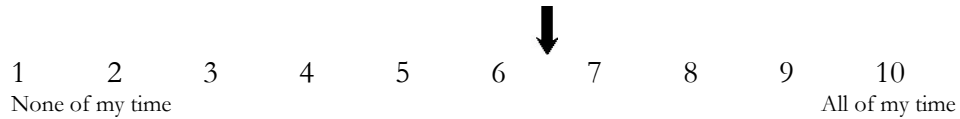
= 7.1
 $\sigma = 2.2$



Management/Supervision of a Business

Many of the respondents indicated that they spend slightly less time on business management versus personnel management. Seventeen percent of respondents' time is spent on business-related activities.

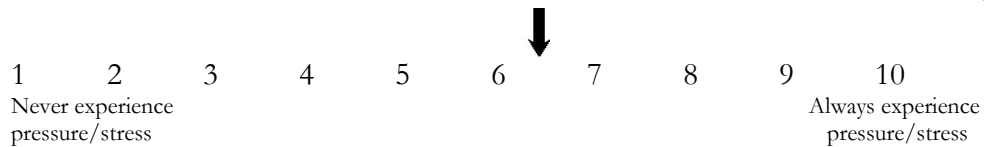
= 6.4
 $\sigma = 2.6$



Pressure/Stress

CHC pharmacists often serve as an easily accessible member of the health care team. This can be a stressful practice setting at times and requires effective understanding of process management as an integral part of the role. Even with this said, respondents indicated that they are mid-range when it comes to stress/pressure.

= 6.3
 $\sigma = 2.1$



Work Schedule

CHC pharmacists feel that they have a relatively regular or predictable work schedule. Most settings have set hours of operations and patients usually make specific appointments.

= 8.1
 $\sigma = 2.4$



Part-Time Opportunities

There appear to be limited part-time opportunities in CHC although this is dependent on the geographic location and the availability of pharmacists for full-time work. There is wide variation among settings, reflected by the high standard deviation.

= 4.7
 $\sigma = 3.1$



Job-Sharing Opportunities

Job-sharing is not a common practice in this field, which is reinforced by the lower range ranking of this factor

= 2.9
 $\sigma = 2.5$



Exit/Re-entry Opportunities

Exit/re-entry opportunities are mid-range for this group.

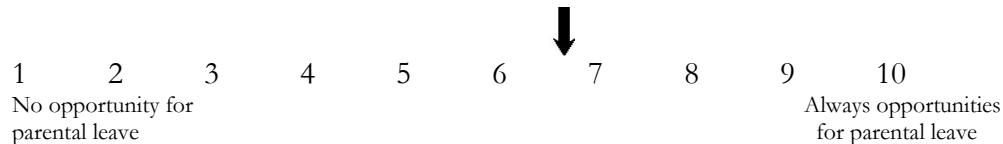
= 5.3
 $\sigma = 2.9$



Parental Leave Opportunities

Parental leave opportunities ranked higher than others in the areas of work-related options. Most employers provide the opportunity for parental leave.

= 6.8
 $\sigma = 3.2$



Leisure/Family Time

With a work schedule that is more regular and predictable, CHC pharmacists are better able to plan for leisure time or time with their families.

= 7.2
 $\sigma = 2.4$



Job Security

Receiving the second-highest score in this profile, pharmacists in CHC agree that they enjoy adequate job security. The current national pharmacist shortage provides relative job security to all pharmacists.

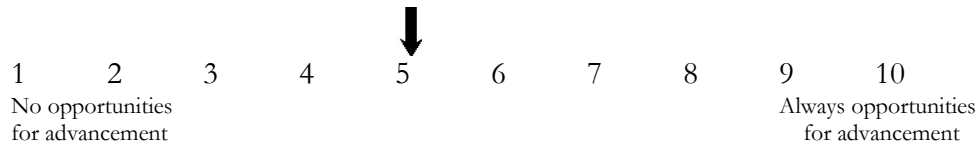
= 8.4
 $\sigma = 1.3$



Opportunities for Advancement

There is wide variation among different CHC practice sites and how the infrastructure is designed. The diversity of activities and the ability to perform different functions provide some opportunities for pharmacists to advance.

= 5.1
 $\sigma = 2.7$



Opportunities for Leadership Development

Effective leadership and practice management skills are necessary for the delivery of pharmaceutical services in a manner consistent with needs for continuous quality improvement in patient care outcomes. Respondents felt that there are many opportunities for them to develop leadership skills within their practices

= 6.9
 $\sigma = 2.4$



Community Prestige

CHC pharmacists enjoy the respect and prestige associated with their practice setting. As previously mentioned, some are highly trained with specialized skills and have high levels of patient interaction. Others may become well known within the neighborhoods where they work and be highly regarded by the public.

= 7.0
 $\sigma = 2.2$



Professional Involvement

Active involvement in pharmacy organizations and events creates opportunities for professional development and the sharing of ideas and knowledge among peers. The extent to which a CHC pharmacist gets involved is largely a personal decision. These pharmacists generally indicated ample opportunity to get involved.

= 7.9
 $\sigma = 2.3$



Income

Pharmacists in general benefit from the nationwide pharmacist shortage with increased levels of income. CHC pharmacists however indicated that their salary range was slightly lower than other settings. This is dependent on the center and salary demands. With a 6.6 rating, respondents feel more often than not that they are properly compensated for their work.

= 6.6
 $\sigma = 2.6$



Benefits (vacation, health, retirement)

Benefits often go hand-in-hand with salary. As with most career paths, a factor in overall job satisfaction may be the benefits. CHC pharmacists are sought after members of the profession and they are usually offered competitive benefit packages. This was the third-highest response for this group.

= 8.2
 $\sigma = 2.1$



Geographic Location

CHC practice settings exist across the country and yielded a mid-range score of 6.2. Nondispensing clinics are most often affiliated with institutions, and are less common in rural areas.

= 6.2
 $\sigma = 3.4$



Autonomy

CHC respondents enjoy the autonomy that occurs in this practice setting. Pharmacists generally work within existing protocols and they can work independent of another health care professional. Pharmacists are free to practice within their scope.

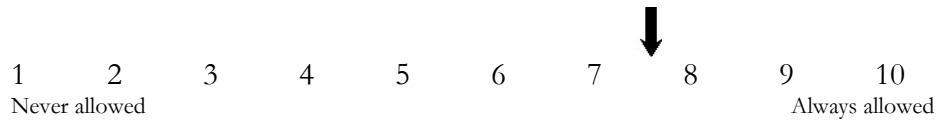
= 7.4
 $\sigma = 1.8$



Self-Worth

CHC pharmacists believe their practice setting provides the opportunity to create personal value and positive outcomes. They are respected members of interdisciplinary teams that provide care for specific patient populations.

= 7.7
 $\sigma = 1.8$



Future Focus

Some tasks in the CHC can be viewed as very immediate-focused duties. Dispensing of prescription medications is more a “now” task rather than “sometime in the future.” However, pharmacists in this setting are involved in the future development of their clinics by planning to adjust for increased patient contact and in ideas on how to further develop the center’s reach. Pharmacists indicated that they have an above average opportunity to focus on the future, with a score of 6.9.

= 6.9
 $\sigma = 1.2$



Professional Prestige

CHC pharmacy offers many opportunities to make a significant contribution to pharmacy. Recognition may be gained by clinical innovation, teaching, research, and professional involvement. Pharmacists in this setting believe opportunities to gain professional prestige are available, reflected by the 6.8 rating.

= 6.8
 $\sigma = 2.7$



Unique Practice Environment

The CHC setting is unique because of the high levels of patient interaction and in some cases, specialized patient services offered. Pharmacists enjoy their practice because they can have a direct effect on patient outcomes.

= 8.1
 $\sigma = 1.7$



Advanced Degree

Advanced degrees are not typically required in CHC pharmacies. Those who do pursue advanced degrees may seek management positions. For nondispensing sites, however, an advanced degree is often required.

= 3.6
 $\sigma = 3.3$



Entrepreneurial Opportunity

Entrepreneurial opportunity is limited in CHC pharmacy depending on the organization's size and the type of programs and services being developed. Within specialized clinics there may be the chance to develop new disease state management and other patient care programs.

= 4.5
 $\sigma = 2.7$



Additional Training

Respondents rated this factor the highest in the profile as they seek additional training and experience. It may not take up a great deal of time, but it is a necessary component of keeping up on clinical and patient care activities.

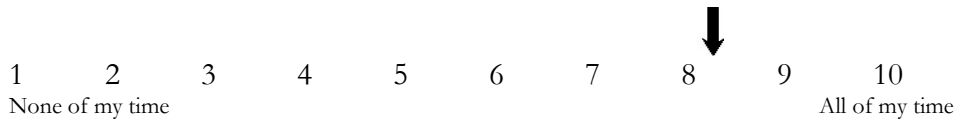
= 8.9
 $\sigma = 2.1$



Interacting With Colleagues

As mentioned earlier, CHC pharmacists like being members of the overall health care team. Respondents indicated that they tend to interact with coworkers on a regular basis.

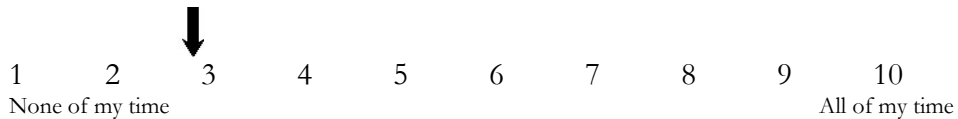
= 8.2
 $\sigma = 1.9$



Travel

Respondents, for the most part, have lower needs to travel for their day-to-day activities. However, attending state, national, or international meetings do provide some travel opportunities.

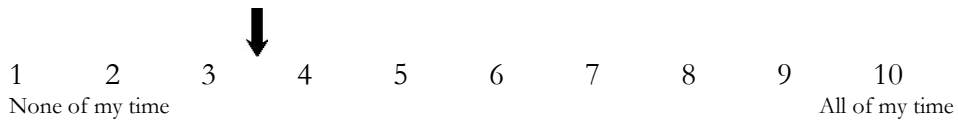
= 2.9
 $\sigma = 1.9$



Writing

Respondents were in the lower range regarding writing.

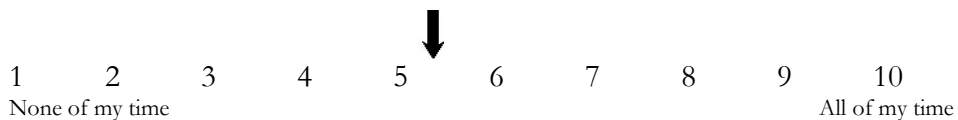
= 3.5
 $\sigma = 1.9$



Working With Teams

Even though interacting with other professionals was one of the most appealing aspects of CHC practice, respondents indicated working with teams as a mid-range response.

= 5.2
 $\sigma = 2.7$



“On Call”

Respondents indicated a low “on call” need for the positions.

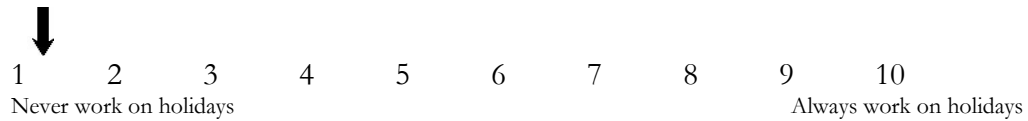
= 2.2
 $\sigma = 2.3$



Work on Holidays

CHC pharmacists tend not to work on holidays at their place of employment. In fact, this was the lowest-rated factor for this profile.

= 1.2
 $\sigma = 0.5$



Work on Weekends

Responses were similar to the statement above.

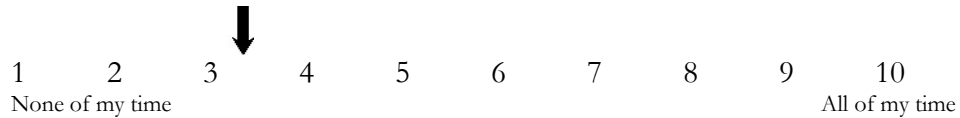
= 1.3
 $\sigma = 0.7$



Presentations

CHC pharmacists indicated that they occasionally provide presentations as an in-service while at other times are invited to speak at a school of pharmacy or community group.

= 3.3
 $\sigma = 2.0$



Mean Scores for Critical Factors

1. Interaction With Patients	7.2
2. Conducting Physical Assessments	2.7
3. Interpreting Laboratory Values	3.1
4. Continuity of Relationships	7.4
5. Helping People	7.3
6. Collaboration With Other Professionals	6.8
7. Educating Other Professionals	5.2
8. Variety of Daily Activities	6.2
9. Multiple Task Handling	7.0
10. Problem Solving	5.3
11. Focus of Expertise	5.7
12. Innovative Thinking	6.8
13. Applying Scientific Knowledge	6.3
14. Applying Medical Knowledge	7.6
15. Creating New Knowledge by Conducting Research	2.7
16. Management/Supervision of Others	7.1
17. Management/Supervision of a Business	6.4
18. Pressure/Stress	6.3
19. Work Schedule	8.1
20. Part-Time Opportunities	4.7
21. Job-Sharing Opportunities	2.9
22. Exit/Re-entry Opportunities	5.3
23. Parental Leave Opportunities	6.8
24. Leisure/Family Time	7.2
25. Job Security	8.4
26. Opportunities for Advancement	5.1
27. Opportunities for Leadership Development	6.9
28. Community Prestige	7.0
29. Professional Involvement	7.9
30. Income	6.6
31. Benefits (vacation, health, retirement)	8.2
32. Geographic Location	6.2
33. Autonomy	7.4
34. Self-Worth	7.7
35. Future Focus	6.9
36. Professional Prestige	6.8
37. Unique Practice Environment	8.1
38. Advanced Degree	3.6
39. Entrepreneurial Opportunity	4.5
40. Additional Training	8.9
41. Interacting With Colleagues	8.2
42. Travel	2.9
43. Writing	3.5
44. Working With Teams	5.2
45. "On Call"	2.2
46. Work on Holidays	1.2
47. Work on Weekends	1.3
48. Presentations	3.3

Reference

Schommer JC, Brown LM, Sogol EM. *Career Pathway Evaluation Program 2007 Pharmacist Profile Survey*. June 2007.

Professional Organizations

American College of Clinical Pharmacy (ACCP)
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1100 15th Street NW, Suite 400, Washington, DC 20005
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www.pharmacist.com

American Society of Health-System Pharmacists (ASHP)
7272 Wisconsin Avenue, Bethesda, MD 20814
Tel: 301-657-3000
www.ashp.com

National Community Pharmacists Association (NCPA)
205 Daingerfield Road, Alexandria, VA 22314
Tel: 703-683-8200 Toll-Free: 800-544-7447 Fax: 703-683-3619
www.ncpanet.org

NOTE: For further pharmacy organization information, please visit the American Association of Colleges of Pharmacy Web site at www.aacp.org and click on the “Related Pharmacy Organizations” link.