

# Government/Federal Pharmacy

## Background

Pharmacists in government/federal pharmacy are employees of local, state, or federal government agencies. These could include government units such as municipal health clinics, state Medicaid agencies, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), branches of the U.S. Military including the Army, Navy, and Air Force, the U.S. Public Health Service (PHS), and other related organizations. The PHS oversees a number of agencies, including, but not limited to, the Coast Guard, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA), the Indian Health Service (IHS), and the National Institutes of Health (NIH). Government/federal pharmacists may be considered active military or have a civilian appointment depending on their place of employment and their position held.

Opportunities for pharmacists in the government are varied and cover a wide scope of practices including clinical, research, and administrative roles. In accord with their practice settings, these pharmacists exhibit considerable diversity in their duties and responsibilities. The broad range includes providing direct patient care through MTM services, dispensing and other drug-related activities, managing and administering pharmacy departments within their government branch, reviewing new drug applications and health administration, and many others. A focus on local, state, and national emergency preparedness is another component of some positions in this field.

One respondent from Maryland stated, “In the Public Health Service, there is immense diversity of responsibility and experience.” Another from California stated that one needs to “be able to view the bigger picture beyond just pharmacy.”

Sixteen percent of their time is spent dispensing medications, including the associated patient counseling. Business/department management takes up an additional 13%, followed by project/case management at 12%, and patient care services at 10%.

A respondent from Kentucky stated, “Each day deals a new challenge...finances, community and ambulatory guidelines, and supervisory skills.” Another respondent from Pennsylvania stated that government/federal pharmacists have “diverse duties that allow [them] to constantly use their education and be creative.”

## Characteristics

A total of 102 pharmacists responded to the 2007 *APhA Career Pathway Evaluation Program* survey. Seventy-eight percent of the respondents indicated having an entry-level pharmacy degree, with 51% having a PharmD degree. Eighteen percent held a non-pharmacy baccalaureate and 37% had an advanced degree (MA, MS, MBA, PhD, or other.) Also, 24% report completing a residency, 2% completed a fellowship, and another 29% completed some type of certificate training. Sixteen percent reported completing other training.

The respondents' average age was 43 years old. Slightly over half of the respondents (52%)

were male. Over half of the respondents (56%) reported that they are in management positions. Annual income data indicated that 39% have an income between \$80,000–\$100,000. While 19% earn less than \$80,000, 43% earn more than \$100,000. Respondents represented 30 states.

The majority of respondents indicated that they were satisfied with their work, with 70% indicating they are “extremely satisfied” and 28% indicating “somewhat satisfied.” Over half of the pharmacists (51%) find their career “extremely challenging” and another 44% responded “somewhat challenging.”

### **Insider’s Perspective**

#### **What aspects of the job are most appealing?**

Nineteen percent of the government/federal pharmacy respondents report that flexibility in the work schedule and hours is the most appealing facet of their work. Some respondents indicated that this impacts their quality of life in a positive way. Two additional areas each received 15% of the respondents’ written comments: interaction with patients and the diversity of work. Ten percent also indicated the opportunities for leadership development and opportunity for growth as appealing aspects of their work.

One respondent from Maryland enjoyed “being given the responsibility and authority to manage a number of very challenging public health programs with minimal day-to-day oversight by [the] supervisor.” Another Maryland respondent provided comments across a number of appealing areas including the “flexibility in schedule, interesting public health issues, and financial security.”

A respondent from Nevada stated “leadership opportunities” and “doing something important” as appealing aspects. A North Carolina respondent summed up what many were stating, “There are a variety of options, ability to grow in skills and responsibility, 20-year retirement, outstanding clinical program, ability to influence national policy.”

#### **What aspects of the job are least appealing?**

Nine percent of the respondents indicated the “bureaucracy” was the least appealing aspect of their work. An additional 5% indicated that “stress” was the least appealing aspect of their practice. Notably, this group had 10% of respondents indicate “none” in the open-ended response for least appealing aspects to their work.

A respondent from Washington stated concerns that the “federal bureaucracy at times can be irritating—[for example, the] constantly changing formulary.” Another from Ohio stated issues related to “time pressures and lack of resources.”

#### **What advice should students and practitioners consider when selecting the option of government/federal pharmacy?**

Comments spanned a variety of areas in this section with three themes emerging. Fifteen percent indicated that pharmacists should look into an internship, residency, or fellowship. Ten percent stated that pharmacists must look at the long-term financial packages when considering government/federal pharmacy positions. An additional 5% of the respondents

indicated that those considering this career path would need to be comfortable wearing a uniform.

A Washington, DC, respondent stated that government/federal pharmacists must have “strong clinical skills, understand public health issues, and be open to change.” Another from California stated, “They must be ready for a challenge; the days can be long and filled with both clinical and distributive problems.” An Illinois pharmacist stated that one should look at “future job satisfaction, career growth, learning, and development.”

There are several opportunities for students and new practitioners to explore different types of practice environments in the government arena. The PHS offers internships that usually range from 30 days to 6 months. They also offer the Commissioned Officer Student Training and Extern Program (COSTEP). Through COSTEP, students have the opportunity to become commissioned officers for up to 120 days, thus enabling them to experience the opportunities offered by a PHS career.



### Helping People

Government/federal pharmacists responding to this survey are fairly evenly divided between direct and indirect assistance to people, reflecting the range between those who are directly involved with patients and those who are principally involved in management responsibilities that can have indirect impact.

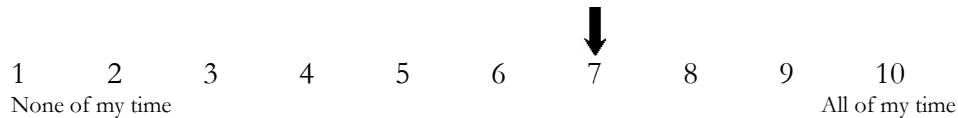
= 5.1  
 $\sigma = 3.0$



### Collaboration With Other Professionals

A higher rating of 7.0 shows a greater involvement of government/federal pharmacists in collaborating with other (non-pharmacist) professionals. This may reflect the close interactions pharmacists have in municipal health clinics, various branches of the military, and within the VA. Collaborative practice is well established within the IHS as well.

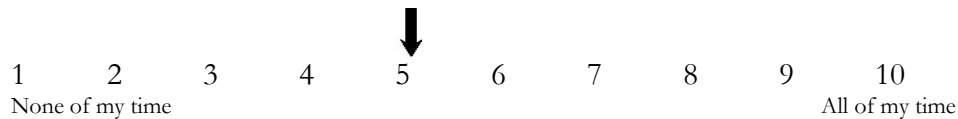
= 7.0  
 $\sigma = 2.0$



### Educating Other Professionals

A rating of 5.1 indicates the mid-range time commitment by these pharmacists in educating other professionals. Pharmacists practicing in the government or federal arena are asked to share their knowledge with other health providers through in-service programs and other forums.

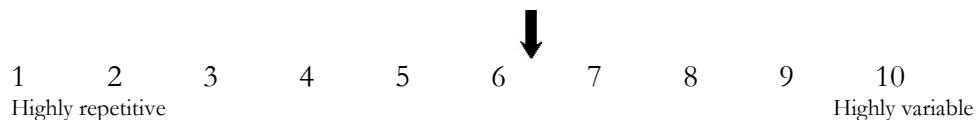
= 5.1  
 $\sigma = 2.4$



### Variety of Daily Activities

The 6.3 ranking indicates a tendency toward variety in daily duties, which some respondents considered to be an appealing aspect of their practice. Some pharmacists may focus on more traditional dispensing roles in their positions, while others may be required to manage staff, participate in meetings, attend professional gatherings, or perform research, as part of their responsibilities.

= 6.3  
 $\sigma = 2.4$



### Multiple Task Handling

The 7.6 rating shows that government/federal pharmacists juggle multiple tasks in their practice. Balancing patient needs, administrative matters, and management oversight may be a routine part of their job. Considering the fast pace in which public health issues can change, one can see how these pharmacists need to be able to multitask.

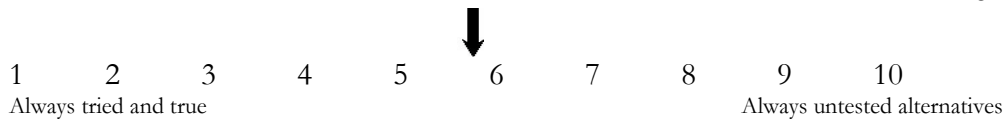
= 7.6  
 $\sigma = 2.1$



### Problem Solving

Pharmacists in the government/federal arena sometimes use known solutions and at other times must design innovative solutions to new problems. The way problems are solved depends on the type of position these pharmacists hold.

= 5.8  
 $\sigma = 2.0$



### Focus of Expertise

“Exactly mid-range” aptly describes the government/federal pharmacy pathway, again demonstrated in this category by the breadth of positions. Respondents indicated that they are midway between being generalists versus needing or using more specialized expertise.

= 5.5  
 $\sigma = 2.5$



### Innovative Thinking

Government/federal pharmacists show a need to “think outside the box” in their positions, with a 6.7 rating. Such innovation could range from a clinician’s development of a new patient record system to a proposal for changing policy and procedures within a military pharmacy operation to pharmacists’ activities as first responders, depending on the specific position involved.

= 6.7  
 $\sigma = 2.1$

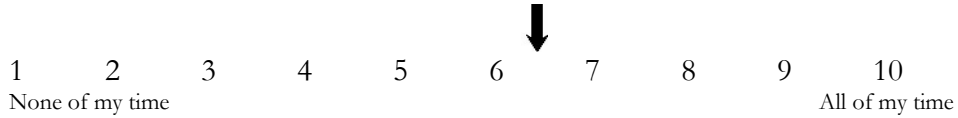


### Applying Scientific Knowledge

Applying scientific knowledge received a 6.3 rating, indicating government/federal pharmacists' frequent reliance on their scientific foundation as pharmacists or their advanced scientific training beyond pharmacy in carrying out activities. Pharmacists who serve within the FDA often need to apply their scientific knowledge in reviewing new drug applications.

= 6.3

$\sigma = 2.4$

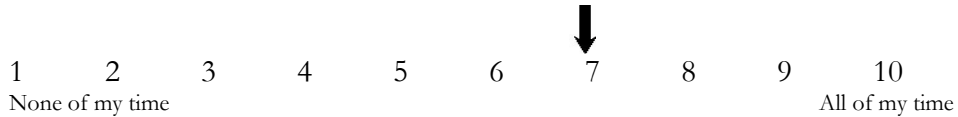


### Applying Medical Knowledge

Applying medical knowledge received a 6.9 rating, slightly higher than that for application of scientific knowledge.

= 6.9

$\sigma = 2.0$

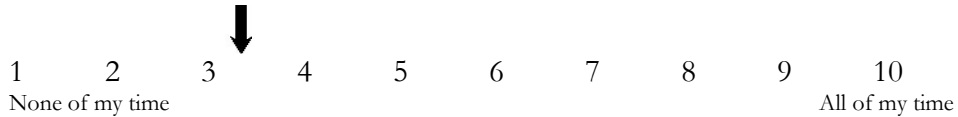


### Creating New Knowledge by Conducting Research

With a 3.3 rating, government/federal pharmacists do not often conduct research in their positions; exceptions might include clinical studies within direct patient care settings.

= 3.3

$\sigma = 2.6$

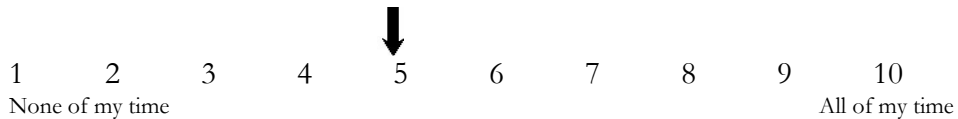


### Management/Supervision of Others

A solid majority (57%) of pharmacists indicate they are in management positions and spend more than half their time addressing management or supervisory responsibilities. This varies significantly across different positions. Some pharmacists may spend virtually their entire work time in such activities, while others spend considerably less.

= 4.9

$\sigma = 2.9$

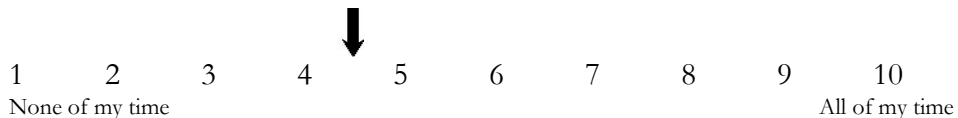


### Management/Supervision of a Business

As stated in the above factor, the majority of respondents indicate some type of management responsibilities.

= 4.5

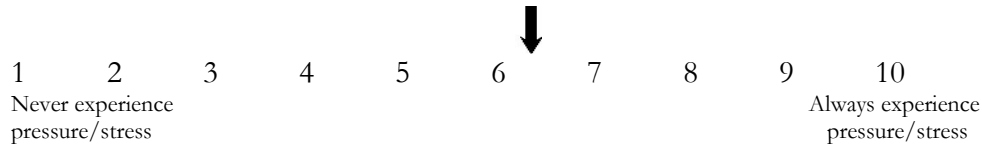
$\sigma = 3.1$



### Pressure/Stress

Pharmacists in government/federal pharmacy feel stress and pressure in their daily work activities, perhaps reflecting the need to balance many tasks. A respondent from Oklahoma indicated that there is “high stress at times.”

= 6.2  
 $\sigma = 2.2$



### Work Schedule

Pharmacists in this setting have a very predictable work schedule. These practitioners know their workday schedules in advance and are able to plan their leisure or off-time activities.

= 7.2  
 $\sigma = 2.7$



### Part-Time Opportunities

Not surprisingly, these pharmacists are not employed in organizations that offer many part-time opportunities for pharmacists, unlike some other pharmacy settings. These opportunities vary among the various positions, however, with more part-time positions offered within more traditional dispensing roles.

= 2.3  
 $\sigma = 2.3$



### Job-Sharing Opportunities

Job-sharing received the identical rating as the above factor.

= 2.3  
 $\sigma = 2.3$





### Exit/Re-entry Opportunities

Opportunities for exit/re-entry received a mid-range rating. This can be viewed in a couple of ways. Respondents may be transferred from one position to another and be able to return to a previous position. In addition, respondents may need to leave a position for active duty and then return.

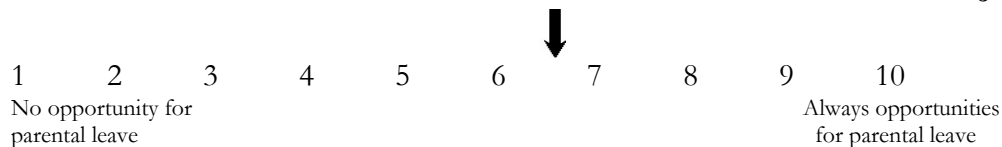
= 4.5  
 $\sigma = 2.9$



### Parental Leave Opportunities

Respondents rated this factor the highest of the work opportunity questions at 6.6.

= 6.6  
 $\sigma = 3.2$



### Leisure/Family Time

Reflecting their predictable work schedule, pharmacists in government/federal pharmacy are able to plan and enjoy their free time for personal or family activities, reflected by the higher 7.4 rating. Typically, all government employees not in a direct patient care setting would have weekends and holidays for their personal enjoyment.

= 7.4  
 $\sigma = 2.5$



### Job Security

Tied for the highest rating across all profiles, respondents rated their job security at 8.6. Government/federal pharmacy employees feel a very high degree of job security with little variation; this factor was the second highest for the group on the survey. Some of this sense of security may be explained by the thorough screening and civil service administrative procedures employed prior to the person being hired into government service. Additional protections are provided through public employees regulations and civil service procedures, which are legislatively ratified protections not commonly available in the private sector.

= 8.6  
 $\sigma = 1.7$



### Opportunities for Advancement

Government/federal pharmacists report that there is ample opportunity for advancement in their workplace. An Oklahoma respondent stated there is room for “growth, advancement, professional development.”

= 7.5  
 $\sigma = 3.5$



### Opportunities for Leadership Development

With a 7.8 rating, government/federal pharmacists generally experience a good level of opportunity for leadership development. This might be available through assistance or encouragement obtaining an advanced degree as well as learning new management or leadership skills. Leadership training and development is a key aspect of the military.

= 7.8  
 $\sigma = 2.7$



### Community Prestige

Government/federal pharmacists report a high level of prestige within the community, perceiving that their dual roles as a pharmacist and as a government employee create an aura of respect for them and their position. Many pharmacists serving in the military receive public respect.

= 7.1  
 $\sigma = 2.4$



### Professional Involvement

With a 7.9 rating, government/federal pharmacists enjoy a high level of opportunity to be involved in the pharmacy profession. That involvement includes belonging and participating in professional organizations and meetings as well as attending continuing education programs. Many organizations in the pharmaceutical industry call upon the unique perspectives of government/federal pharmacists to help guide their program development.

= 7.9  
 $\sigma = 2.2$









### Travel

Travel is not a specific requirement for the day-to-day roles of respondents. Nonetheless, there is opportunity to travel depending on the specific position in pharmacy.

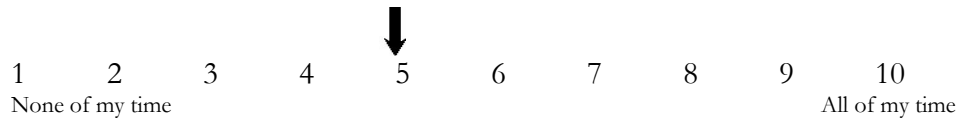
= 3.3  
 $\sigma = 2.0$



### Writing

Respondents were mid-range in the amount of writing that they do. Perhaps the writing of reports, a necessity for the government, enters into the picture for many of these pharmacists.

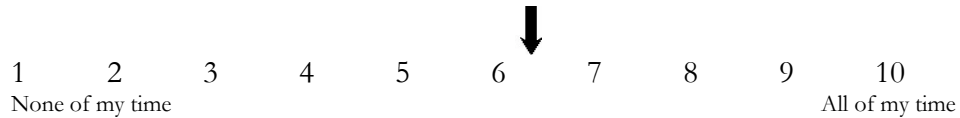
= 4.9  
 $\sigma = 2.5$



### Working With Teams

As mentioned earlier, many positions are team based. However, practitioners seeing patients may work independently in some instances when interacting with their patients.

= 6.3  
 $\sigma = 2.4$



### “On Call”

Surprisingly, respondents indicated a lower mid-range level of “on call” status.

= 3.9  
 $\sigma = 3.3$



### Work on Holidays

As noted earlier, most government employees do not work on holidays.

= 1.9  
 $\sigma = 1.3$



### Work on Weekends

Respondents indicated a slightly higher possibility of working on weekends versus holidays.

**= 2.1**

**$\sigma = 1.5$**

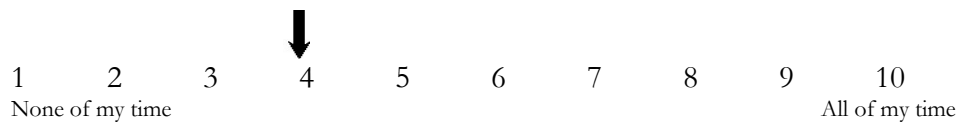


### Presentations

Respondents rated presentations at a 3.9, indicating that there are times when they give presentations but that this is a lower time commitment than other activities.

**= 3.9**

**$\sigma = 2.0$**



### Mean Scores for Critical Factors

1. Interaction With Patients	5.0
2. Conducting Physical Assessments	1.6
3. Interpreting Laboratory Values	2.8
4. Continuity of Relationships	5.1
5. Helping People	5.1
6. Collaboration With Other Professionals	7.0
7. Educating Other Professionals	5.1
8. Variety of Daily Activities	6.3
9. Multiple Task Handling	7.6
10. Problem Solving	5.8
11. Focus of Expertise	5.5
12. Innovative Thinking	6.7
13. Applying Scientific Knowledge	6.3
14. Applying Medical Knowledge	6.9
15. Creating New Knowledge by Conducting Research	3.3
16. Management/Supervision of Others	4.9
17. Management/Supervision of a Business	4.5
18. Pressure/Stress	6.2
19. Work Schedule	7.2
20. Part-Time Opportunities	2.3
21. Job-Sharing Opportunities	2.3
22. Exit/Re-entry Opportunities	4.5
23. Parental Leave Opportunities	6.6
24. Leisure/Family Time	7.4
25. Job Security	8.6
26. Opportunities for Advancement	7.5
27. Opportunities for Leadership Development	7.8
28. Community Prestige	7.1
29. Professional Involvement	7.9
30. Income	7.5
31. Benefits (vacation, health, retirement)	9.2
32. Geographic Location	7.9
33. Autonomy	7.4
34. Self-Worth	8.2
35. Future Focus	7.2
36. Professional Prestige	7.1
37. Unique Practice Environment	8.3
38. Advanced Degree	5.2
39. Entrepreneurial Opportunity	3.1
40. Additional Training	8.5
41. Interacting With Colleagues	7.8
42. Travel	3.3
43. Writing	4.9
44. Working With Teams	6.3
45. "On Call"	3.9
46. Work on Holidays	1.9
47. Work on Weekends	2.1
48. Presentations	3.9



**Reference**

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

**Professional Organizations**

American Pharmacists Association (APhA)  
1100 15th Street NW, Suite 400, Washington, DC 20005  
Tel: 800-237-APhA Fax: 202-783-2351  
[www.pharmacist.com](http://www.pharmacist.com)

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

Department of Health and Human Services (HHS)  
[www.hhs.gov/pharmacy](http://www.hhs.gov/pharmacy)

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