

Independent Community Pharmacy

Background

An independent community pharmacy may be a single store with a sole proprietor or may consist of several stores owned by an individual or small group. Store count is often used to differentiate an independent pharmacy from a chain pharmacy. Generally, a pharmacy is considered as independent if the total count is fewer than four stores. In practice, however, small chains with four or more stores may function much more like a traditional independent pharmacy if that is the objective of the owner(s).

Owning an independent pharmacy can be very rewarding. It provides the opportunity to practice pharmacy in accord with one's personal style. Changes can be implemented quickly and pharmacists in independent community pharmacy can offer specialty services or fill a niche in the community. Yet, with opportunity come demands—particularly on time. One respondent from Nebraska put it simply, "I am my own boss." Another in New York stated, "As an independent owner, I am the boss of everything." Independent ownership also provides pharmacists with the opportunity to use their entrepreneurial skills. In addition to clinical and traditional pharmacy services, independent pharmacists typically get involved to a greater extent in merchandising, marketing, and other general management functions.

Management of an independent community pharmacy is usually the duty of the owner. In some settings, the manager may be an employee pharmacist, particularly when the pharmacy consists of two or more community outlets. In some independent community pharmacies, the staff pharmacist is also the assistant manager of the pharmacy. Occasions can arise when independent community pharmacists decide to sell their store(s), such as when they feel it is time either to have someone else take over the management side of the business or upon retirement. An independent pharmacy owner may be willing to work out creative financing and will often be interested in continuing to work on at least a part-time basis.

Staff pharmacists in independent pharmacy often report to the owner(s) directly. This can create unique challenges and opportunities. Building and maintaining relationships with patients in the community is an important responsibility of pharmacists in independent community pharmacies, one that is appealing to most pharmacists in this setting. These relationships are often the foundation on which the business has been built and prospered.

The roles and responsibilities of a staff pharmacist will vary at different pharmacies. A pharmacist at one independent pharmacy may be primarily responsible for patient services while at another pharmacy the staff pharmacist may be primarily responsible for supervising technicians. A staff pharmacist in an independent community pharmacy is often in a position to bring about change and implement new services, including medication therapy management (MTM). Good communication skills and an outgoing personality are valuable traits for pharmacists interested in pursuing independent community pharmacy. An independent staff pharmacist from Michigan liked "having access to the boss every day."

NOTE: Because of the small number of independent community pharmacy staff respondents, both management and staff are combined for this profile. Almost three fourths (73%) of the respondents are in management positions.

Fifty-one percent of the respondents' time is spent dispensing medications, including the associated patient counseling. Business/department management requires an additional 13%, followed by medication preparation/compounding at 11%, patient care services (e.g., MTM, disease management) at 6%, personnel management at 5%, and data management at 5%.

Characteristics

Forty-four pharmacists in independent community pharmacy management responded to the 2007 *APhA Career Evaluation Pathway Program* survey. Eighty-five percent of respondents held an entry-level pharmacy degree with 32% having a PharmD degree. None of the respondents listed advanced degrees (MA, MS, MBS, PhD) although 5% did list "other" degree. Eleven percent had been through a residency program; 2% completed a fellowship; 25% had been through a certificate training program, and 5% reported having been through some form of other training.

Respondents' average age was 47 years old. Just over half (53%) of respondents were male. Seventy-three percent indicated some type of management role. Income data show 24% earn between \$80,000–\$100,000. Fifty-four percent earn \$100,000 or more per year with 18% indicating they earn more than \$170,000. The average time worked per week was 44 hours. Respondents represented 26 states.

Respondents indicated that they were satisfied with their work, with 64% indicating "extremely satisfied" and 34% indicating "somewhat satisfied." Similarly, most respondents indicated that they felt the work was quite challenging with 43% indicating "extremely challenging" and 52% indicating "somewhat challenging."

Insider's Perspective

What aspects of the job are most appealing?

Fifty percent of the respondents indicated that patient contact/interaction was the most appealing aspect of their work. The main reason many independent community pharmacists initially entered the profession was to help patients. One respondent from Oregon indicated enjoyment in "counseling, MTM, getting to really know my patients, and really being able to help them."

Interestingly, 10% of respondents, both managers and staff, indicated that they enjoyed making adaptations and changes for patients. One respondent from Idaho liked "the ability to implement changes and try new things." Another from Michigan stated that the "flexibility in making changes to meet the needs of our patients" is one of the most appealing aspects of the work.

What aspects of the job are least appealing?

Forty-eight percent indicated that insurance issues were the least appealing aspect of their work. A respondent from California stated the least appealing issue was “dealing with rejected claims and having to call the insurance companies.” One Connecticut respondent went on to state that it was common to “spend more or equal time counseling patients about their insurance plans [than they] do about their medications.” One respondent from Virginia had a different perspective regarding the least appealing aspects, stating, “It’s more difficult to work in multidisciplinary teams.”

Thirty-three percent of the staff independent pharmacists indicated that they find management and administrative functions one of the least appealing aspects of their work. In addition, 16% of independent managers indicated that the managerial responsibilities were one of the least appealing aspects of their work.

What advice should students and practitioners consider when selecting a management position in independent community pharmacy?

Pharmacists emphasized a variety of areas with no one theme being presented. Overall, most indicated the need to like people and the desire to help others. This cannot be overemphasized considering the fact that community pharmacists are generally the most accessible health professional. And in small communities, patients are not bashful about calling their pharmacist at home for much-needed advice or to have a prescription filled.

One respondent from Montana stated, “Being a pharmacist is awesome; however you must be a committed individual who loves people.” Another from New Jersey enjoyed the “flexibility of the management in allowing pharmacist[s] to exercise professional judgment.”

Critical Factor Ratings

Interaction With Patients

Interaction with patients was cited by the respondents as one of the most appealing aspects of their work. One California respondent indicated the ability to “service patients with your knowledge and help them make their decisions.”

= 7.1
 $\sigma = 1.8$



Conducting Physical Assessments

Despite the recent emphasis on pharmaceutical care and disease management services, these pharmacists spend relatively little time conducting physical assessments. Nonetheless, it is notable that independent community pharmacists rated this factor the highest across all other career profiles in the survey.

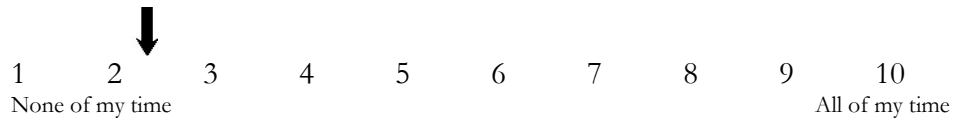
= 3.3
 $\sigma = 2.0$



Interpreting Laboratory Values

While independent community pharmacists rated physical assessment as the highest factor compared with all other groups, they do not rate interpreting laboratory values very high. Perhaps this underscores that laboratory values are not readily available to the community-based practitioner.

= 2.3
 $\sigma = 1.6$



Continuity of Relationships

Independent community pharmacists rated this factor the highest across all career profiles. Respondents indicated that the majority of relationships with patients are ongoing and/or long-term. Continuity of relationships is vitally important to the success of these businesses.

= 8.4
 $\sigma = 1.3$



Helping People

Similar to continuity of relationships, independent community pharmacists rated this factor the highest across all profiles. These pharmacists generally agreed that most of the effect they have on the well being of individuals is direct, rather than indirect. This is certainly consistent with the amount of time independent community pharmacists spend interacting with patients and the degree to which they have long-term relationships with them.

= 7.8
 $\sigma = 1.5$



Collaboration With Other Professionals

Independent pharmacists have good relationships with other health professionals in their communities. Pharmacists have an important role in maintaining open communication with other health care providers regarding the drug therapy of patients and in bringing drug therapy problems to the attention of the appropriate prescriber.

= 4.8
 $\sigma = 2.0$



Educating Other Professionals

Educating other health care professionals is an important role of the pharmacist, although in community practice not as much time is devoted to it compared with educating patients. One of the most common educational activities enjoyed by pharmacists in the independent community setting is precepting student pharmacists.

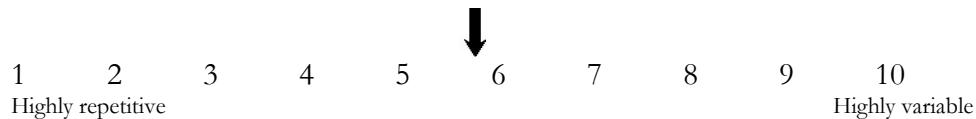
= 3.4
 $\sigma = 1.9$



Variety of Daily Activities

Pharmacists in independent community pharmacies were mid-range in characterizing their daily activities. Owning, managing, or staffing an independent community pharmacy involves a great number of activities outside the dispensing process and even outside the pharmacy department.

= 5.7
 $\sigma = 2.0$



Job-Sharing Opportunities

Independent community pharmacists indicated a low mid-range response to job-sharing at a rating of 4.3.

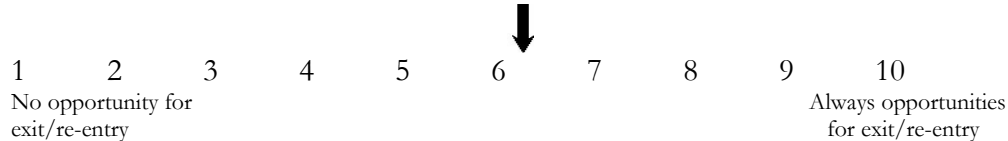
= 4.3
 $\sigma = 3.1$



Exit/Re-entry Opportunities

Opportunities do exist to exit/re-enter. The difficulty is being able to re-enter the same position at the same pharmacy.

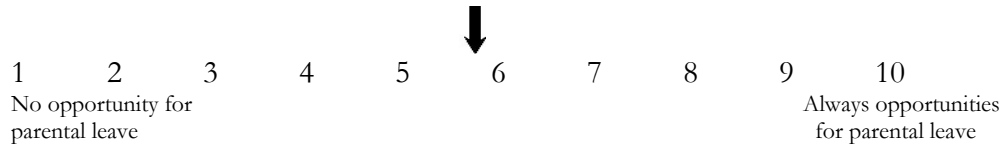
= 6.3
 $\sigma = 3.3$



Parental Leave Opportunities

As independent pharmacies are relatively small organizations, parental leave is a benefit that is offered on a limited basis at some stores that have the capability to “fill in” with other staff. Many try to provide some type of benefit in this area.

= 5.7
 $\sigma = 3.4$



Leisure/Family Time

Even with the demanding schedule of independent community pharmacy, respondents indicated that they do have some leisure/family time. However, if one is both the pharmacy owner and manager, time can be more difficult to come by unless the practice is well established. Independent pharmacy owners have the ability to set their own schedule, but must factor in the cost of creating free time for outside activities and any additional staffing needs when they are gone.

= 6.8
 $\sigma = 2.3$



Job Security

The job security in independent community pharmacy is highly dependent on the success of the business. Not surprisingly, independent community pharmacists ranked job security in the high range with an 8.3 rating.

$$= 8.3$$
$$\sigma = 2.0$$



Opportunities for Advancement

Independent community pharmacists had mixed opinions on opportunities for advancement. This wide variance may relate to the pharmacists' position; owners/managers have no upper movement since they are already in the top position, whereas staff pharmacists do have the opportunity to move up. In some cases, partnerships are formed whereas in other situations, an owner looking to retire may step aside as owner/manager and advance someone to the manager position. The relative success of the business also could be viewed as a measure of advancement.

$$= 5.3$$
$$\sigma = 3.2$$



Opportunities for Leadership Development

On-the-job experience provides significant opportunity for the development of leadership skills for pharmacists in independent community pharmacy. These pharmacists must make decisions and provide direction to support staff throughout the day. The ability to gain the support, cooperation, and loyalty of coworkers or employees is important to the success of the business.

$$= 7.7$$
$$\sigma = 2.7$$



Community Prestige

Pharmacists are highly visible, well-respected, and trusted individuals in the community. There was strong agreement among respondents that they enjoy much more prestige than others in the community.

$$= 8.5$$
$$\sigma = 1.9$$



Professional Involvement

Active involvement in pharmacy meetings and events creates opportunities for professional development and the sharing of ideas and knowledge among peers. The extent to which a pharmacist gets involved is largely a personal decision. Respondents agreed there was ample opportunity to get involved. One pharmacist from Michigan commented, "It is important to understand that involvement in our profession is critical."

= 7.6
 $\sigma = 2.5$



Income

There is a significant risk-reward opportunity in independent pharmacy, especially ownership. The more successful you are in business the greater the income; but if you are unable to compete effectively with the competition there is a great deal to be lost if the business fails. Respondents tended toward the upper mid-range of the scale of being properly compensated for their work.

= 7.9
 $\sigma = 2.6$



Benefits (vacation, health, retirement)

Benefits often go hand-in-hand with an overall employment package. Independent community pharmacists ranked the benefits package at 7.1.

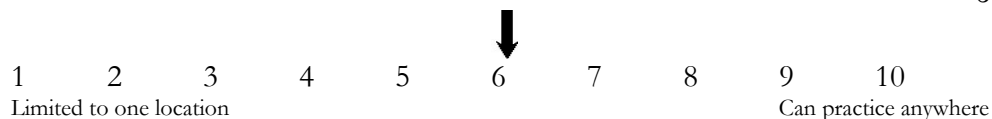
= 7.1
 $\sigma = 2.6$



Geographic Location

The nationwide shortage of pharmacists presents ample opportunity for pharmacists to be employed in virtually any geographic location. However, there is limited mobility because once the practice is established it is difficult to move in independent community pharmacy.

= 6.1
 $\sigma = 3.7$



Autonomy

Ranked the third-highest factor in this profile, independent community pharmacists enjoy a great deal of freedom in making decisions and implementing change to meet their personal goals and objectives. Autonomy is synonymous with independence.

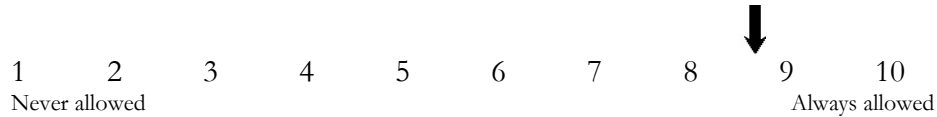
= 8.5
 $\sigma = 1.4$



Self-Worth

Ranked the second-highest factor in this profile, respondents indicated that their practice provides many opportunities to create personal value and positive outcomes through decision making and accomplishments.

= 8.7
 $\sigma = 2.0$



Future Focus

A community pharmacy is as much a business as it is a health care facility. The pharmacists must be focused on trends in the industry and be proactive to remain competitive. These pharmacists generally agreed that their practice allows them to focus on the future.

= 7.1
 $\sigma = 2.3$



Professional Prestige

Working in the community can provide the opportunity for professional prestige. This is somewhat dependent on the individual pharmacist's goals regarding this factor.

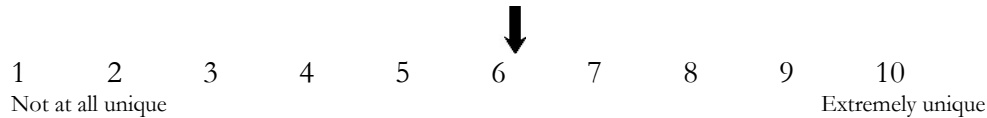
= 7.3
 $\sigma = 2.9$



Unique Practice Environment

The extent to which independents find themselves in a unique practice environment depends on the pharmacy itself. As discussed previously, these pharmacists have the ability to make changes and structure the practice environment to meet their individual preferences. The ability of each pharmacist to create a niche for the practice provides opportunities to make the practice site unique.

= 6.1
 $\sigma = 3.2$



Advanced Degree

There was strong agreement among those in independent community pharmacy that an advanced degree is not required. Many, however, obtain additional (non-degree) training to meet special needs.

= 2.6
 $\sigma = 2.9$



Entrepreneurial Opportunity

Independent community pharmacists rated the entrepreneurial aspects of their work as the highest ranked factor among all profiles in the survey. The entrepreneurial spirit is strong in independent community pharmacy. It is likely their strong entrepreneurial spirit that drove these individuals to independent community pharmacy in the first place. The ability to accept the risks of business to succeed in the highly competitive community pharmacy marketplace is essential.

= 7.4
 $\sigma = 2.9$



Additional Training

This factor was rated the highest both across the entire survey and for this career profile. Additional training provides the skills needed to implement new services and differentiate an independent pharmacy from its competitors. Specific business and clinical-related training also helps if a pharmacy decides to provide a unique service to the community as a whole.

= 9.5
 $\sigma = 1.1$



Interacting With Colleagues

As one would suspect, independent pharmacists interact with coworkers on a daily basis.

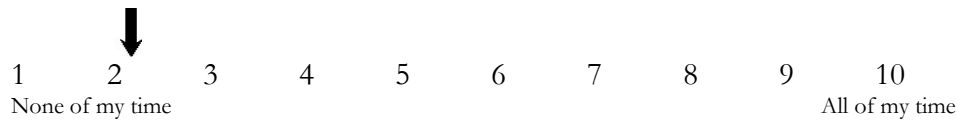
= 8.3
 $\sigma = 2.0$



Travel

Independent pharmacists for the most part have lower needs to travel for their day-to-day activities. This factor received the lowest rating in the profile at 2.1.

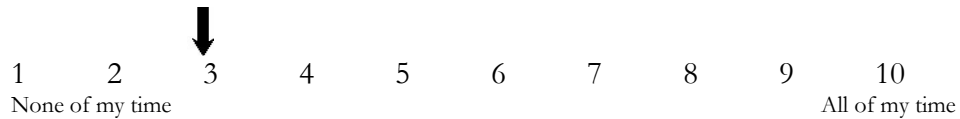
= 2.1
 $\sigma = 1.1$



Writing

Respondents were in the low range regarding writing. These pharmacists usually do not have to write lengthy reports.

= 2.9
 $\sigma = 1.8$



Working With Teams

In an independent pharmacy, teams take on a different meaning compared with a larger organization. Respondents indicated they tended toward less time in teams. This rating may take into account that the staff of the entire organization work together in one location and can communicate regularly when needed.

= 4.5
 $\sigma = 3.5$



“On Call”

Respondents surprisingly indicated a mid-range “on call” need for the positions. Many of the independent pharmacies have an “on call” service to take care of regular customers and to respond to questions when the pharmacy is closed.

= 4.5
 $\sigma = 3.5$



Work on Holidays

Independent community pharmacies tend to close on major holidays or have very limited hours.

$$\begin{aligned} &= 2.5 \\ \sigma &= 2.6 \end{aligned}$$



Work on Weekends

Most independent community pharmacists alternate every other weekend. However, a busier store may require only every third weekend because there are more pharmacists. In addition, many independent pharmacies have limited weekend hours.

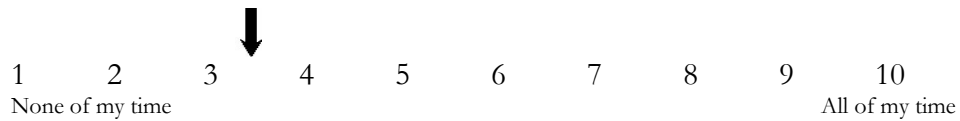
$$\begin{aligned} &= 4.9 \\ \sigma &= 2.9 \end{aligned}$$



Presentations

Presentations ranked in the lower range at 3.4. While many do not give presentations, others who are involved with colleges of pharmacy may provide occasional presentations to student pharmacists or to community groups.

$$\begin{aligned} &= 3.4 \\ \sigma &= 2.2 \end{aligned}$$



Mean Scores for Critical Factors

1. Interaction With Patients	7.1
2. Conducting Physical Assessments	3.3
3. Interpreting Laboratory Values	2.3
4. Continuity of Relationships	8.4
5. Helping People	7.8
6. Collaboration With Other Professionals	4.8
7. Educating Other Professionals	3.4
8. Variety of Daily Activities	5.7
9. Multiple Task Handling	7.6
10. Problem Solving	4.3
11. Focus of Expertise	4.1
12. Innovative Thinking	5.9
13. Applying Scientific Knowledge	5.9
14. Applying Medical Knowledge	6.9
15. Creating New Knowledge by Conducting Research	2.9
16. Management/Supervision of Others	6.5
17. Management/Supervision of a Business	5.7
18. Pressure/Stress	7.0
19. Work Schedule	7.9
20. Part-Time Opportunities	6.0
21. Job-Sharing Opportunities	4.3
22. Exit/Re-entry Opportunities	6.3
23. Parental Leave Opportunities	5.7
24. Leisure/Family Time	6.8
25. Job Security	8.3
26. Opportunities for Advancement	5.3
27. Opportunities for Leadership Development	7.7
28. Community Prestige	8.5
29. Professional Involvement	7.6
30. Income	7.9
31. Benefits (vacation, health, retirement)	7.1
32. Geographic Location	6.1
33. Autonomy	8.5
34. Self-Worth	8.7
35. Future Focus	7.1
36. Professional Prestige	7.3
37. Unique Practice Environment	6.1
38. Advanced Degree	2.6
39. Entrepreneurial Opportunity	7.4
40. Additional Training	9.5
41. Interacting With Colleagues	8.3
42. Travel	2.1
43. Writing	2.9
44. Working With Teams	4.5
45. "On Call"	4.5
46. Work on Holidays	2.5
47. Work on Weekends	4.9
48. Presentations	3.4

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)
3101 Broadway, Suite 650, Kansas City, MO 64111
Tel: 816-531-2177 Fax: 816-531-4990
www.accp.com

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

National Pharmaceutical Association (NPhA)
107 Kilmayne Drive, Suite C, Cary, NC 27511
Tel: 800-944-NPhA Fax: 919-469-5870
www.npha.net

Retail Industry Leaders Association (RILA)
1700 North Moore Street, Suite 2250, Arlington, VA 22209
Tel: 703-841-2300
www.retail-leaders.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.