

Medical Communications/Drug Information

Background

Pharmacists who specialize in medical communications/drug information provide educational services about pharmaceutical products for health care professionals, pharmaceutical industry personnel, and consumers. They may be employed by medical communications firms, pharmaceutical manufacturers, academic institutions, managed care organizations, hospitals, professional associations, clinical research organizations, or other health care settings. Their responsibilities vary by the type of setting in which they practice.

Their efforts may be internally focused, for example providing services to employees of a pharmaceutical manufacturer or as an in-house library and information service. Or their clientele may be the general public, for example providing information in a poison control center in response to queries from physicians, nurses, other pharmacists, or the general community. Perhaps more frequently, these pharmacists are manufacturers' employees with the responsibility for providing authoritative information on their company's products to pharmacists or physicians with specific information needs regarding a particular product (e.g., special dosage needs, unusual reactions). Additionally, many pharmacists are employed by medical communications companies or professional associations that publish authoritative drug information references.

As one respondent from Indiana stated, “[I] provide needed drug information to other health care professionals based on their requests.” A New Jersey respondent indicated “answer[ing] questions that nobody else can find the answer to.”

Medical communications/drug information pharmacists have diverse responsibilities in the health care system. Sixteen percent of their time is spent on project/case management. Twelve percent is spent on data management, followed by 11% on health professional consulting, 10% on department management, 9% on service (committee work), and the remainder divided across a variety of other functions.

Characteristics

Nineteen pharmacists responded to the 2007 *APhA Career Pathway Evaluation Program* survey—one of the smallest groups in this survey. While a small sample, trends and attitudes can be discerned from the survey.

Among the respondents, 94% had earned an entry-level pharmacy degree, with 73% having earned the PharmD degree. Only 5% had an advanced degree (MA, MS, MBA, or PhD). Nearly all, however, have undertaken educational or training programs beyond their earned pharmacy degree. Sixty-three percent had completed a residency, 16% had earned a certificate, and 21% had taken other training.

The respondents were younger than other categories in this survey; the mean age was 39 years old. Consistent with the demographics of younger pharmacists, a full 95% of this group was female. Almost two thirds (63%) identify themselves as being in management.

Forty percent of these pharmacists report that they earn between \$80,000–100,000 annually. Twenty percent report annual income in excess of \$100,000. Medical communications/drug information pharmacists work an average of 41 hours per week.

Seventy-four percent report that they were “extremely satisfied” with their work, with the remaining 26% indicating they were “somewhat satisfied.” Similarly, 63% reported being “extremely challenged” with their work and the remaining 37% reported “somewhat challenged.” None were dissatisfied or unchallenged in their practice settings.

A respondent from Wyoming indicated that the position was “mentally challenging.” A colleague from Indiana wrote “extremely satisfied.”

Insider’s Perspective

What aspects of the job are most appealing?

Thirty-seven percent of the respondents indicated that the schedule flexibility was the most appealing aspect of their work. In addition, medical communications/drug information pharmacists enjoy the ability to apply their knowledge base. Thirty-two percent indicated that they found the application of their knowledge an appealing aspect.

A Colorado respondent indicated enjoyment in the “ability to apply critical thinking/literature evaluation skills regularly.” A New Jersey respondent enjoyed “the varied responsibilities.”

What aspects of the job are least appealing?

Only one issue was highlighted by multiple respondents: 21% reported “politics” as the least appealing portion of their work. Two respondents from Wisconsin and New Jersey were very precise in their feedback when they wrote one word responses—“politics.”

What advice should students and practitioners consider when selecting the option of medical communications/drug information pharmacy?

A theme emerged from this group stressing the need to enjoy research. Endorsing this concept, a Wyoming respondent noted that medical communications/drug information pharmacists need the “desire to [do] in-depth research and find complete answers.” A respondent from Iowa stated, “Make sure you like research topics and can think critically.” Finally, a Washington medical communications pharmacist stated that one “needs to gain clinical experience and expertise in drug information/communications and clinical trials/statistics.”

Helping People

Another low range rating of 1.9 indicates that the help and services these respondents provide in their practices are almost exclusively indirect, rather than directly helping individuals. The exception to this rule is when the medical communications department is housed in a tertiary care institution where other practitioners have easy access to come in and request information.

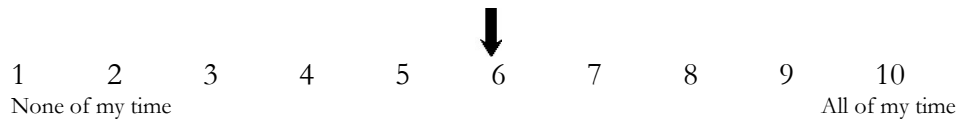
= 1.9
 $\sigma = 1.2$



Collaboration With Other Professionals

Medical communications/drug information pharmacists engage in collaboration with other professionals on a regular basis. This may well be a function of the specific position and the type of organization employing the pharmacist.

= 5.9
 $\sigma = 2.8$



Educating Other Professionals

Medical communications/drug information pharmacists rated this factor mid-range at 5.7, indicating that they spend time educating health professionals other than pharmacists.

= 5.7
 $\sigma = 2.7$



Variety of Daily Activities

To a high degree, these specialists experience a wide variety of activities and issues in their daily responsibilities reflected by the 7.1 rating.

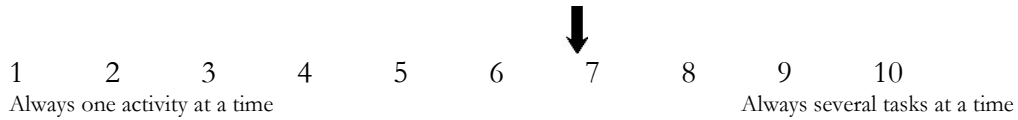
= 7.1
 $\sigma = 2.2$



Multiple Task Handling

Medical communications/drug information pharmacists experience the need for multitasking as indicated by the 6.9 rating for this factor. Their work is inherently involved in the accomplishment of a myriad of duties from telephone calls to writing and editing—all at the same time.

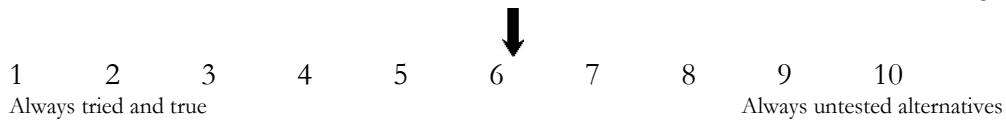
= 6.9
 $\sigma = 2.7$



Problem Solving

On the mid-range of the scale at 6.1, these respondents are slightly more involved in seeking solutions to problems by untested means, rather than being able to rely on previously used alternatives. This rating may be in response to an unusual dosage form need or a drug reaction experienced by a patient.

= 6.1
 $\sigma = 1.5$



Focus of Expertise

Medical communications/drug information pharmacists equally use a sharply defined area of expertise along with general expertise in carrying out their responsibilities. This rating is consistent with the data that few have advanced degrees, yet most have achieved other forms of advanced training.

= 5.6
 $\sigma = 2.7$



Innovative Thinking

Medical communications/drug information pharmacists tend to be involved in innovative thinking as a part of their practice. This is consistent with their responses regarding problem solving and their continuing need to apply solid scientific knowledge to both constantly changing and new questions or problems.

= 7.5
 $\sigma = 1.9$



Applying Scientific Knowledge

The application of scientific knowledge is critical for medical communications/drug information pharmacy and this response confirms it. Pharmacists in this field apply such information all the time.

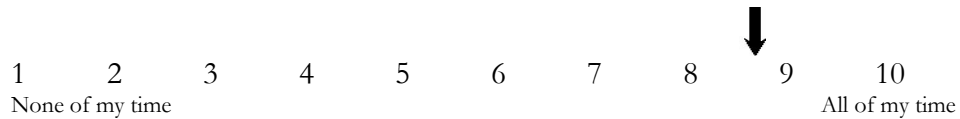
= 8.4
 $\sigma = 2.1$



Applying Medical Knowledge

Tied for the third-highest rating in the profile, respondents indicated that medical knowledge is the very essence of medical communications/drug information pharmacy.

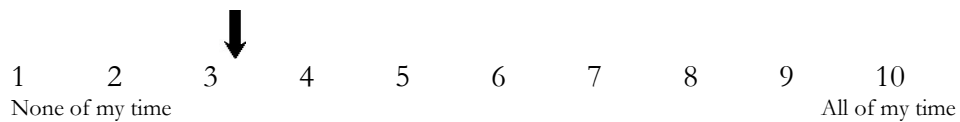
= 8.7
 $\sigma = 1.6$



Creating New Knowledge by Conducting Research

Despite their concentration on research to obtain accurate information regarding a drug product or preparation, these pharmacists do not perceive themselves as generating “new” information through research. Consequently, a 3.2 rating is on the lower end of the spectrum, identifying the creation of new knowledge as consuming a smaller portion of their practice time.

= 3.2
 $\sigma = 2.9$



Management/Supervision of Others

Respondents find themselves in the lower mid-range with regard to the time they spend managing and supervising others.

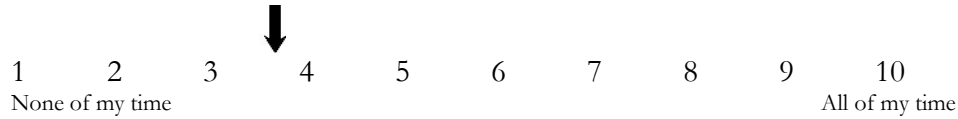
= 4.1
 $\sigma = 2.9$



Management/Supervision of a Business

Respondents indicated that they spend slightly less time on the management of the business compared with managing others.

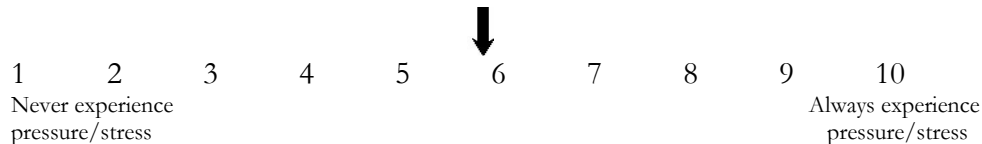
$$= 3.7$$
$$\sigma = 2.7$$



Pressure/Stress

As with many types of pharmacy practitioners, there is a moderate stress level within the medical communications/drug information environment. In this case, the pressure may be coming from other professionals, rather than from the patient or the public.

$$= 5.8$$
$$\sigma = 2.7$$



Work Schedule

A high range 7.9 rating identifies a regular and predictable work schedule for these pharmacists. This is not surprising, given the “office” nature of the work (i.e., Monday–Friday) and generally large corporate employers.

$$= 7.9$$
$$\sigma = 2.1$$



Part-Time Opportunities

Part-time opportunities exist in this field to a moderate level.

$$= 5.2$$
$$\sigma = 3.4$$



Job-Sharing Opportunities

Because of the nature of the activities performed by medical communications pharmacists, job-sharing opportunities are limited.

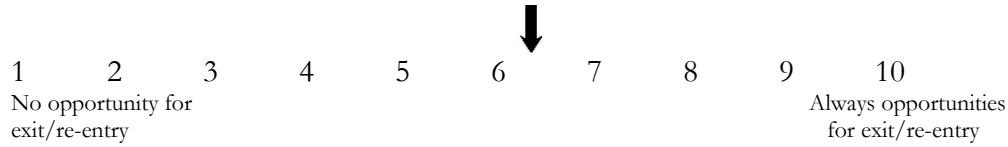
$$= 3.4$$
$$\sigma = 2.8$$



Exit/Re-entry Opportunities

Exit/re-entry opportunities are mid-range for this group with a rating of 6.3, indicating that there are opportunities if someone exits the field and wants to regain employment.

= 6.3
 $\sigma = 2.2$



Parental Leave Opportunities

Medical communications pharmacists rated parental leave the highest across all profiles in this survey. In addition, this factor is tied for the highest rating internally for this group.

= 8.9
 $\sigma = 1.9$



Leisure/Family Time

Medical communications pharmacists rated this factor 7.8, which ties this for the highest response for this factor across all profiles. To a considerable degree, these pharmacists enjoy ample opportunity for personal and family time. This is made possible by the reliability and regularity of their work schedule and the very nature of the work.

= 7.8
 $\sigma = 2.2$



Job Security

Consistent with related responses regarding work schedule and availability of free time, medical communications/drug information pharmacists enjoy a high range level of job security. They are generally employed by larger institutions and corporations in which employment is stable by nature.

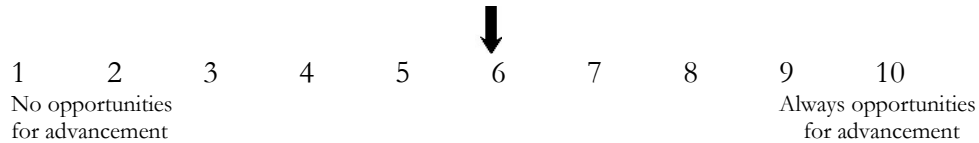
= 7.7
 $\sigma = 1.7$



Opportunities for Advancement

Depending on the size of their employer and the department they work in, different opportunities for advancement exist for medical communications/drug information pharmacists. With a 5.9 rating, these pharmacists indicate having the chance to move ahead in their chosen careers.

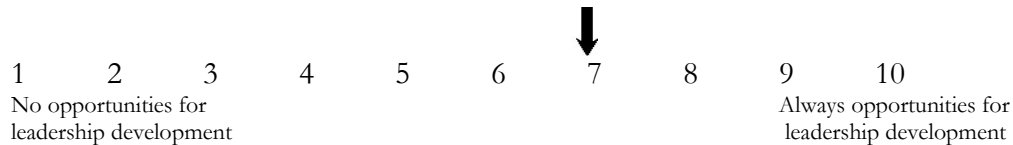
= 5.9
 $\sigma = 2.8$



Opportunities for Leadership Development

Opportunities to develop leadership skills are widely available to these pharmacists within their employment.

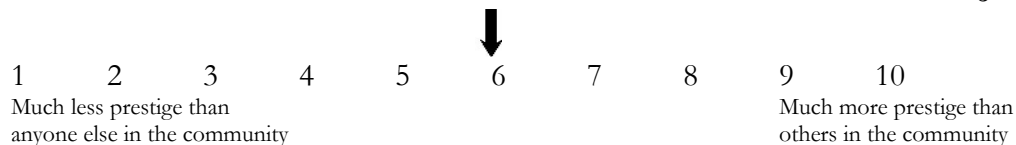
= 6.9
 $\sigma = 2.7$



Community Prestige

Medical communications/drug information pharmacists indicated that they are mid-range regarding prestige within the community. This also may be specific to the environment because in some settings where they interact with the public (e.g., a poison control center), pharmacists are held in very high esteem by patients and others.

= 5.9
 $\sigma = 2.7$



Professional Involvement

A high range rating of 8.4 is evidence that medical communications/drug information pharmacists have the opportunity to participate in meetings and other events within the pharmacy profession. The very nature of their work involves knowledge of and acceptance by other practitioners and professionals, so it is advantageous for these pharmacists to know others within the profession and to be known by them as reliable information sources.

= 8.4
 $\sigma = 2.5$



Income

These pharmacists indicated that they are properly compensated for their work within the medical communications/drug information practice setting.

= 8.2
σ = 2.2



Benefits (vacation, health, retirement)

Directly related to responses for income level are the matter of benefits. This rating acknowledges that benefits such as vacation, health insurance, and retirement packages are available to medical communications/drug information pharmacists. Employment by larger corporate entities also are a positive factor in this regard.

= 8.1
σ = 2.2



Geographic Location

With an 8.3 rating, pharmacists report that they are able to relocate nearly anywhere in the United States. If affiliated with academic institutions or hospitals, relocation is widely available. With the pharmaceutical industry, however, corporate entities are concentrated in California, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, North Carolina, Indiana, Illinois, and other geographic regions thereby limiting relocation choices.

= 8.3
σ = 2.9



Autonomy

Medical communications/drug information pharmacists enjoy a great deal of autonomy in carrying out their responsibilities. They operate independently and make decisions without much supervision.

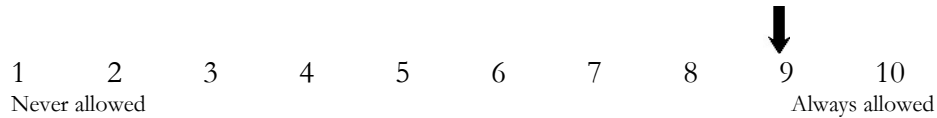
= 8.1
σ = 1.6



Self-Worth

Tied for the highest rating with parental leave, medical communications/drug information pharmacists feel a high level opportunity to create personal value and positive outcomes through their work. This response may be related to the degree of challenge and job satisfaction previously discussed.

= 8.9
 $\sigma = 1.2$



Future Focus

Medical communications/drug information pharmacists are usually involved looking toward the future side of a situation, rather than on immediate concerns. This seems logical, since each new inquiry or problem must be anticipated by the medical communications/drug information pharmacist as a predecessor to many similar inquiries in the future.

= 7.7
 $\sigma = 2.1$



Professional Prestige

In the upper range rating, these pharmacists are highly regarded among their peers within the pharmacy profession. This is consistent with the earlier measurements of opportunity for professional involvement and leadership development.

= 7.5
 $\sigma = 2.6$



Unique Practice Environment

These pharmacists work in a unique practice setting, reflected by the high 8.7 rating, which is tied for the third highest in this profile. Access to computerized data, patented information, and cutting-edge knowledge of a wide variety of information banks adds to this aura of uniqueness.

= 8.7
 $\sigma = 2.6$



Advanced Degree

Despite that demographic data show only 5% have earned advanced degrees, most respondents indicated that a graduate degree is required for medical communications/drug information pharmacy. A variation in the responses may reflect differences in requirements across employers and practice settings.

= 6.1
 $\sigma = 3.9$



Entrepreneurial Opportunity

With a mid-range rating, medical communications/drug information pharmacists believe that there are limited opportunities for entrepreneurs within the field. Interestingly, there are a few respondents who work from home offices and look at themselves as entrepreneurial. Some practice settings may allow for more entrepreneurship and creativity (e.g., developing a new drug information resource).

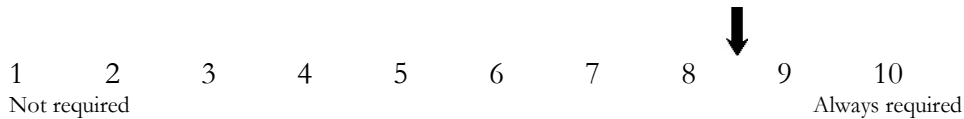
= 4.9
 $\sigma = 3.5$



Additional Training

A high response rating of 8.5 indicates that continual training after entering the field is needed to practice and maintain competency in medical communications/drug information pharmacy.

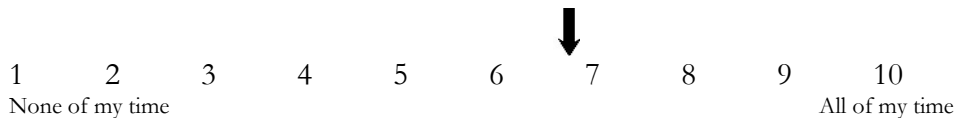
= 8.5
 $\sigma = 2.3$



Interacting With Colleagues

Considering the work that these pharmacists do, it is not surprising that they interact with colleagues often.

= 6.8
 $\sigma = 2.2$



Travel

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

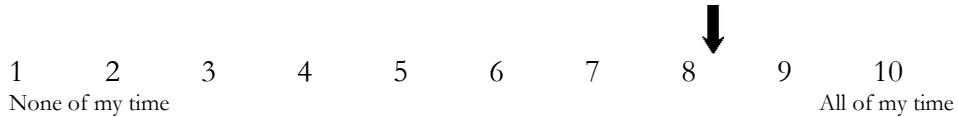
= 2.5
 $\sigma = 1.4$



Writing

Respondents were high range in the amount of writing that they do. The writing of reports and the necessity for logging information enters into the picture for many of these pharmacists.

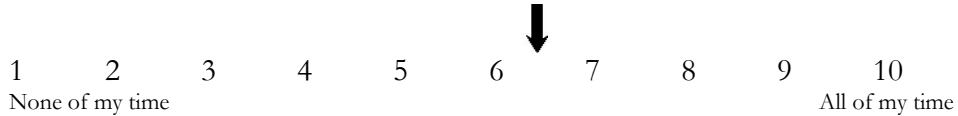
= 8.2
 $\sigma = 2.0$



Working With Teams

Respondents work both as individuals and with teams. The team approach is related to larger projects and complex questions that are asked of the group.

= 6.4
 $\sigma = 2.4$



“On Call”

Not surprisingly, respondents indicated a low range level of “on call” status.

= 1.8
 $\sigma = 1.5$



Work on Holidays

Most medical communications pharmacists do not have to work on holidays.

= 1.4
 $\sigma = 0.6$



Work on Weekends

Similar to the above factor, respondents indicated that their position called for very limited time at work on the weekends.

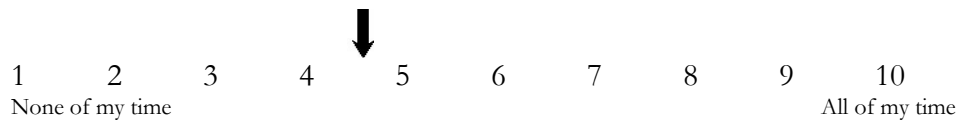
$$\begin{aligned} &= 1.9 \\ \sigma &= 1.4 \end{aligned}$$



Presentations

Respondents rated presentations at 4.6, indicating that there are times when they give presentations but this time commitment is lower than for other activities. Taking into consideration the rating for writing, it appears that most of the communications to other health care providers are written versus formal presentations.

$$\begin{aligned} &= 4.6 \\ \sigma &= 2.3 \end{aligned}$$



Mean Scores for Critical Factors

1. Interaction With Patients	2.7
2. Conducting Physical Assessments	1.1
3. Interpreting Laboratory Values	2.1
4. Continuity of Relationships	4.4
5. Helping People	1.9
6. Collaboration With Other Professionals	5.9
7. Educating Other Professionals	5.7
8. Variety of Daily Activities	7.1
9. Multiple Task Handling	6.9
10. Problem Solving	6.1
11. Focus of Expertise	5.6
12. Innovative Thinking	7.5
13. Applying Scientific Knowledge	8.4
14. Applying Medical Knowledge	8.7
15. Creating New Knowledge by Conducting Research	3.2
16. Management/Supervision of Others	4.1
17. Management/Supervision of a Business	3.7
18. Pressure/Stress	5.8
19. Work Schedule	7.9
20. Part-Time Opportunities	5.2
21. Job-Sharing Opportunities	3.4
22. Exit/Re-entry Opportunities	6.3
23. Parental Leave Opportunities	8.9
24. Leisure/Family Time	7.8
25. Job Security	7.7
26. Opportunities for Advancement	5.9
27. Opportunities for Leadership Development	6.9
28. Community Prestige	5.9
29. Professional Involvement	8.4
30. Income	8.2
31. Benefits (vacation, health, retirement)	8.1
32. Geographic Location	8.3
33. Autonomy	8.1
34. Self-Worth	8.9
35. Future Focus	7.7
36. Professional Prestige	7.5
37. Unique Practice Environment	8.7
38. Advanced Degree	6.1
39. Entrepreneurial Opportunity	4.9
40. Additional Training	8.5
41. Interacting With Colleagues	6.8
42. Travel	2.5
43. Writing	8.2
44. Working With Teams	6.4
45. "On Call"	1.8
46. Work on Holidays	1.4
47. Work on Weekends	1.9
48. Presentations	4.6

Reference

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

Professional Organizations

American Association of Colleges of Pharmacy (AACCP)
1426 Prince Street, Alexandria, VA 22314
Tel: 703-739-2330 Fax: 703-836-8982
www.aacp.org

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

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

Drug Information Association (DIA)
800 Enterprise Road, Suite 200, Horsham, PA 19044
Tel: 215-442-6100 Fax: 215-442-6199
www.diahome.org

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

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.