

Specialty Pharmacy

Background

The definition of specialty pharmaceuticals and specialty pharmacy continue to change as the field begins to segment itself from traditional pharmacy. Many pharmacy organizations — including the American Pharmacists Association (APhA), the Association of Managed Care Pharmacy (AMCP), the National Association of Chain Drug Stores (NACDS), and the Specialty Pharmacy Association of America (SPAARx)—have provided definitions of specialty pharmacy.

For this background section, information is provided from the NACDS document titled *Specialty Pharmacy in Community Pharmacy: The Time Is Now—and How!* The basic premise is that a specialty pharmacy dispenses medications (injectable, intravenous, or oral) in certain chronic and life-threatening disease states. Specific clinical monitoring is required for some of the medications. Many of the medications also have a high cost associated with their use and may have adverse event profiles that are more complex than other medications. As noted by NACDS:

Specialty pharmacy is defined as the service created to manage the handling and service requirements of specialty pharmaceuticals, including dispensing, distribution, reimbursement, case management, and other services specific to patients with rare and/or chronic diseases.

The focus on appropriate drug utilization in conjunction with the ongoing monitoring of patient care is an essential element of the specialty pharmacy field. Examples of the types of diseases addressed within the scope of specialty pharmacy services include:

- Cancer
- Crohn's disease
- Gaucher's disease
- Growth hormone deficiency
- Hemophilia
- Hepatitis C
- HIV/AIDS
- Immune disorders
- Infertility
- Multiple sclerosis
- Pulmonary hypertension
- Rheumatoid arthritis

Characteristics

Twenty-seven pharmacists in specialty pharmacy responded to the 2012 *APhA Career Pathway Evaluation Program* survey. Thirty-five percent of respondents held an entry-level pharmacy degree; 65% held the PharmD degree. Thirty percent indicated they held an advanced degree (MA, MS, MBS, PhD, or other). Thirty percent had been through a residency program, 30% had been through a certificate training program, and 5% reported having been through some form of other training.

Respondents' average age was 46 years old. Forty percent of respondents were female.

Income data show 13% earn between \$80,000–\$100,000, while 51% earn \$100,000 or more per year, with 13% earning greater than \$150,000. The average time worked per week was 41 hours.

An overwhelming majority of respondents indicated that they were satisfied with their role, with 61% indicating “extremely satisfied” and 31% indicating “somewhat satisfied.” Similarly, most respondents indicated that they felt the job was challenging, with 54% indicating “extremely challenging” and 42% indicating “somewhat challenging.”

Insider’s Perspective

What aspects of the job are most appealing?

Specialty pharmacy is a growing field and the practice environment itself is changing. One of the most appealing aspects of these roles, cited by 24% of pharmacists, was their work schedule. This was followed by 12% who indicated that the benefits provided to them also are a very appealing aspect of the work. Respondents indicated that they spend 32% of their time on patient care services including counseling when dispensing a medication.

Additional comments included the appealing aspect of working with a team of professionals and the challenges of clinical practice in the specialty area.

One respondent summed up many of the thoughts expressed when stating that the role was appealing because of “work with other pharmacists and nurses, and have the ability to work from home when needed—have a flexible schedule. The benefits package is tremendous.”

What aspects of the job are least appealing?

Specialty pharmacists listed three areas equally as least appealing aspects of the role in an open-ended section of the survey. Travel, volume of prescriptions processed, and low patient interaction were cited by 12% of pharmacist as least appealing aspects of their roles. An important distinction to make is the different roles that pharmacists have in the specialty area. Some roles are more dispensing based while others are more patient-centered information based.

One respondent indicated that “some travel is involved, which leads to lots of communication issues.” Another just used one word to describe the least appealing aspect of the work—“travel.”

What advice should students and practitioners consider when selecting the option of specialty pharmacy?

One practitioner noted that students should “try to work in a specialty pharmacy, ask a lot of questions, and observe the clinical and financial aspects of the practice.” Another added, “If students are able to think creatively and have the patience to address and resolve issues, specialty pharmacy will employ many of these skills including many they will learn that are not taught in pharmacy school.”

Critical Factor Ratings

Interaction With Patients

Specialty pharmacists' responses varied on this critical factor as some indicated that they have little time for interaction with patients while others indicated that they had a great deal of time interacting with patients. Rating this factor may be based on the type of specialty practice where they are employed. Those in a specialty pharmacy that provides only mail order services may have less time than those in other settings for patient interaction.

= 4.9



Conducting Physical Assessments

This group rated conducting physical assessments as the lowest critical factor. Specialty pharmacists rarely if ever conduct physical assessments.

= 1.3



Interpreting Laboratory Values

Interpreting laboratory values also was one of the lowest-rated critical factors. There is little opportunity for specialty pharmacists to get access to laboratory values at this time.

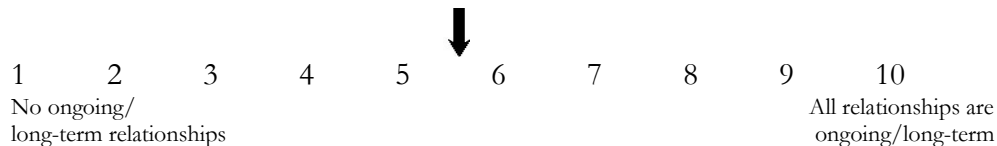
= 2.7



Continuity of Relationships

Specialty pharmacists are almost exactly mid-range at 5.6 with regard to continuity of relationships. However, those in specific disease state areas have greater opportunities to have long-term relationships with patients.

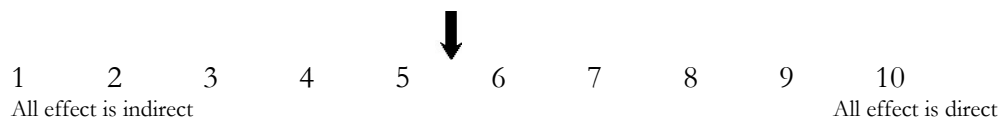
= 5.6



Helping People

At a 5.5 rating, specialty pharmacists are at the mid-point with regard to direct or indirect patient contact.

= 5.5



Collaboration With Other Professionals

Specialty pharmacists lean more toward collaboration with other professionals. One respondent put it this way, “I have meetings with other providers and patients helping them be successful with their medications.”

= 6.4



Educating Other Professionals

While specialty pharmacists are in the low mid-range at 4.6 for educating other professionals, one respondent indicated educating others by noting they “precept fourth-year pharmacy students on rotation.”

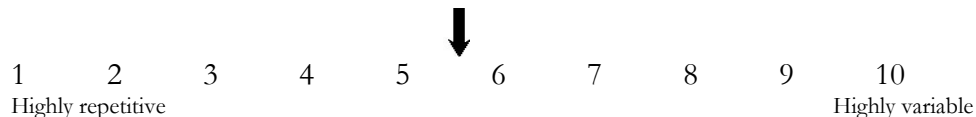
= 4.6



Variety of Daily Activities

Specialty pharmacists are mid-range in the variety of activities they perform. Some roles and tasks are repetitive.

= 5.6



Multiple Task Handling

One of the five top-rated critical factors, specialty pharmacists indicated that they multitask, often handling multiple functions at a time.

= 7.8



Problem Solving

While pharmacists in this group considered themselves mid-range for problem solving, the opportunities exist for assisting patients with complex medications. One respondent stated, “specific task is to develop an electronic medical record of oncology protocols as a template to create a treatment plan for our patient population.”

= 5.1



Job-Sharing Opportunities

There is little opportunity for job sharing in the field. This factor may be more tied to the specialized needs of the pharmacists and case management.

= 3.6



Exit/Re-entry Opportunities

The possibility to leave the area of specialty and then re-enter rated a 5.3 mid-range for the group.

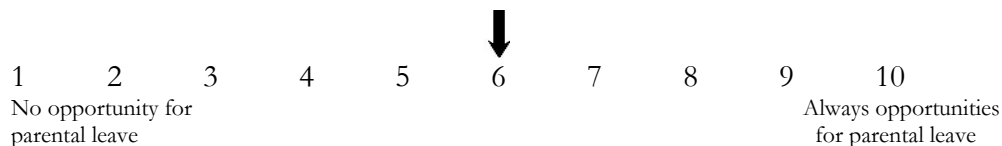
= 5.3



Parental Leave Opportunities

As part of the benefits that were rated high by these pharmacists, parental leave opportunities do exist.

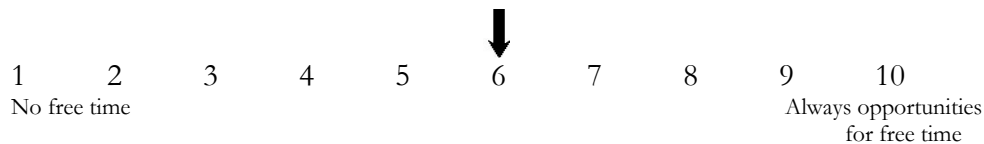
= 6.0



Leisure/Family Time

Specialty pharmacists indicated that they were mid-range at 6.0 relative to having free time for leisure/family time.

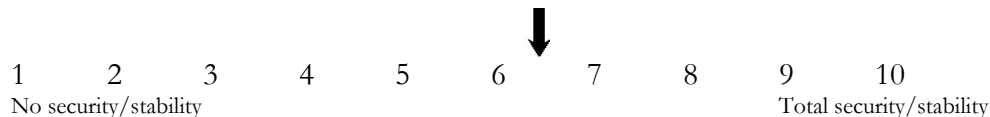
= 6.0



Job Security

Job security trended slightly more toward the security side based on the respondents' ratings.

= 6.4



Opportunities for Advancement

Specialty pharmacists indicated that they have some opportunities for advancement. This factor is also dependent on the type of environment where they work.

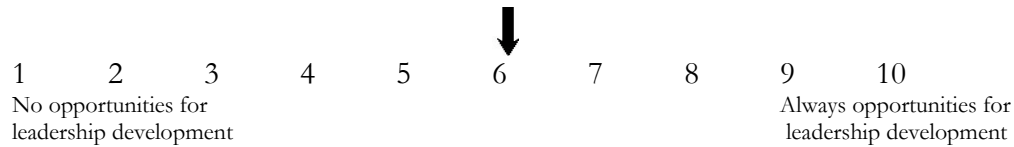
=5.1



Opportunities for Leadership Development

Opportunities exist for leadership development. Some respondents indicated that this relates well to interdisciplinary team leadership.

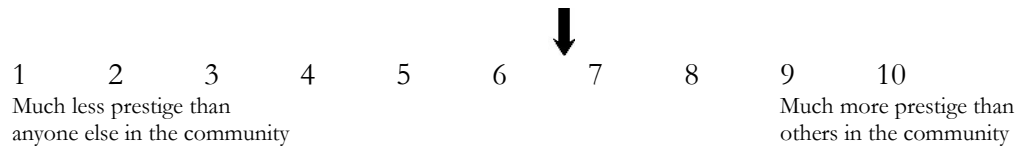
= 6.1



Community Prestige

Specialty pharmacists indicated that they are in the upper mid-range with regard to community prestige. One respondent provided a good example of this by stating, “We are a non-profit pharmacy providing medications at no charge to the patient after the patient has qualified for our services”—a great community service.

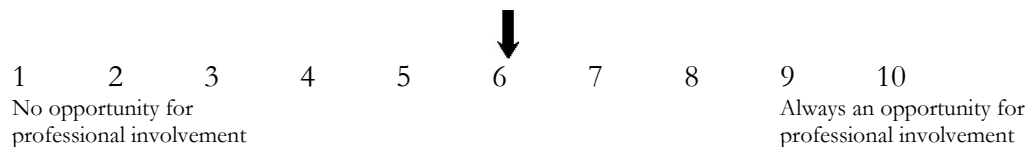
= 6.7



Professional Involvement

The opportunity for professional involvement is similar to most other profiles. This factor is dependent on the individual pharmacist’s motivation and desire to become professionally involved.

= 6.1



Income

Specialty pharmacists indicated that they are in the upper mid-range regarding compensation.

= 6.9



Mean Scores for Critical Factors

| | |
|---|-----|
| 1. Interaction With Patients | 4.9 |
| 2. Conducting Physical Assessments | 1.3 |
| 3. Interpreting Laboratory Values | 2.7 |
| 4. Continuity of Relationships | 5.6 |
| 5. Helping People | 5.5 |
| 6. Collaboration With Other Professionals | 6.4 |
| 7. Educating Other Professionals | 4.6 |
| 8. Variety of Daily Activities | 5.6 |
| 9. Multiple Task Handling | 7.8 |
| 10. Problem Solving | 5.1 |
| 11. Focus of Expertise | 6.7 |
| 12. Innovative Thinking | 6.5 |
| 13. Applying Scientific Knowledge | 5.7 |
| 14. Applying Medical Knowledge | 5.8 |
| 15. Creating New Knowledge by Conducting Research | 3.1 |
| 16. Management/Supervision of Others | 4.7 |
| 17. Management/Supervision of a Business | 4.3 |
| 18. Pressure/Stress | 5.7 |
| 19. Work Schedule | 5.9 |
| 20. Part-Time Opportunities | 4.6 |
| 21. Job-Sharing Opportunities | 3.6 |
| 22. Exit and Re-entry Opportunities | 5.3 |
| 23. Parental Leave Opportunities | 6.0 |
| 24. Leisure/Family Time | 6.0 |
| 25. Job Security | 6.4 |
| 26. Opportunities for Advancement | 5.1 |
| 27. Opportunities for Leadership Development | 6.1 |
| 28. Community Prestige | 6.7 |
| 29. Professional Involvement | 6.1 |
| 30. Income | 6.9 |
| 31. Benefits (vacation, health, retirement) | 7.1 |
| 32. Geographic Location | 5.5 |
| 33. Working Remotely | 3.5 |
| 34. Autonomy | 6.6 |
| 35. Self-Worth | 7.7 |
| 36. Future Focus | 6.6 |
| 37. Professional Prestige | 5.6 |
| 38. Unique Practice Environment | 8.7 |
| 39. Advanced Degree | 4.8 |
| 40. Entrepreneurial Opportunity | 4.6 |
| 41. Additional Training | 6.9 |
| 42. Interacting With Colleagues | 7.7 |
| 43. Travel | 2.7 |
| 44. Writing | 3.4 |
| 45. Working With Teams | 5.7 |

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Professional Organizations

American Pharmacists Association (APhA)

2215 Constitution Avenue NW, Washington DC 20037
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

Board of Pharmacy Specialties (BPS)

2215 Constitution Avenue NW, Washington, DC 20037
Tel: 202-429-7591
www.bpsweb.org

Specialty Pharmacy Association of America (SPAARx)

100 Campus Drive, Florham Park, NJ 07932
Tel: 855-867-8034
www.spaarx.org

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