

## Clinical Specialists

### Background

An individual in the profession of pharmacy can follow a great number of career paths. In addition to more traditional roles, there are many other clinical pharmacists bringing unique expertise and value to the health care system. Many of these pharmacists specialize in practice areas similar to medical specialties, and some have created unique skills and opportunities. Pharmacist specialties include, but are not limited to the following areas:

Adult Medicine	Nephrology
Ambulatory Care*	Neurology
Cardiology	Nuclear/Radiopharmacy*
Compounding*	Nutrition Support
Critical Care	Pediatrics
Diabetic Care	Poison Control
Hematology/Oncology	Psychopharmacy
Hospice	Sports Medicine
Immunization Services	Transplant
Internal Medicine/General Practice	Veterinary Pharmacy
Long-Term Care/Geriatrics*	

*\*Separate profile available.*

Many pharmacists have obtained additional training in a specific disease state or have gained extensive on-the-job experience and have gradually migrated into that clinical area. Most started in traditional pharmacy practice and then pursued the clinical practice area for which they had a passion.

In most cases, clinical specialists do not hold a separate license beyond their pharmacist license. There are opportunities for pharmacists to become certified or credentialed to provide unique services upon achieving adequate experience and, in some cases, passing an exam. While these credentials are generally not required to practice, it documents to employers, peers, and the public that the pharmacist possesses the knowledge and skills to provide specific clinical services.

The mission of the Board of Pharmaceutical Specialties (BPS) is to recognize specialty practice areas, define knowledge and skill standards for recognized specialties, and evaluate the knowledge and skills of individual pharmacist specialists through a certification exam. The BPS offers certification in nuclear pharmacy, nutrition support pharmacy, oncology pharmacy, pharmacotherapy, and psychiatric pharmacy.

The National Institute for Standards in Pharmacist Credentialing (NISPC) offers disease state management certification exams for anticoagulation, asthma, diabetes, and dyslipidemia. The NISPC exams are standardized assessment tools designed to measure the knowledge and judgment of pharmacists providing disease state management services to patients.

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Credentials may be offered by other organizations, depending on the clinical area. For example, the American Association of Poison Control Centers (AAPCC) offers a certification exam for clinical specialists in poison information. The exam is offered to pharmacists and other health professionals who have met minimum practice requirements. Regional poison centers are required to maintain a minimum number of certified specialists on staff. The American Academy of Clinical Toxicology (AACT) offers a credentialing process and, upon successful completion of a certification exam, awards diplomat status in the American Board of Applied Toxicology (ABAT), which is an organization for the unique purpose of fostering the development of clinical toxicology among the non-physician, non-veterinarian members of the AACT. While credentials are important for pharmacists practicing in unique areas, work must continue to address competition among health care professionals and compensation for services.

### **Characteristics**

Sixty-nine pharmacist clinical specialists responded to the 2012 *APhA Career Pathway Evaluation Program* survey. Eighty percent of respondents held an entry-level or post bachelorette PharmD degree. Twenty-four percent indicated that they also had a non-pharmacy bachelor's degree and 40% indicated an advanced degree (MA, MS, MBS, PhD, or other). Forty-two percent had been through a residency program, 39% had been through a certificate training program, and 18% reported having been through some form of other training.

Respondents' average age was 43 years old. Three-quarters (71%) of respondents were female. Income data show the under a quarter (21%) earn less than \$100,000, while 69% earn \$100,000 or more per year, with 5% earning greater than \$150,000. The average time worked per week was 38.7 hours.

A majority of respondents indicated that they were satisfied with their job, with 51% indicating "extremely satisfied" and 42% indicating "somewhat satisfied." Similarly, most respondents indicated that they felt the job was quite challenging, with 51% indicating "extremely challenging" and 45% indicating "somewhat challenging."

### **Insider's Perspective**

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

Because of the great variety of clinical specialist positions, work environments, duties, and responsibilities, the aspects of the jobs that were most appealing and least appealing overlap less than in other careers. What is true for one clinical practice is not necessarily true for other practices.

The ability to work on a team with other health care professionals to directly improve patient care was frequently mentioned as the most appealing aspect of a career in clinical practice. Many pharmacists working in clinical areas have a great deal of patient contact, whereas others have minimal contact with patients and work primarily with other health providers.

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Respondents also indicated that they spend 36% of their time on patient care services and 16% of their time on medication management services.

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

Administration (bureaucracy) and paperwork were both cited by many of pharmacist clinical specialists as one of the least appealing aspects of their jobs. These pharmacists are very satisfied with the work they perform, but do not enjoy the record keeping that needs to be completed to substantiate their services or to quantify outcomes.

Long hours, staffing concerns, and heavy workload were each cited by respondents as well. Notably, pharmacist clinical specialist positions are dependent on patient load and other factors that are beyond control of the pharmacist. One pharmacist commented that there is “too much work for one person to accomplish all tasks.”

**What advice should students and practitioners consider when selecting the option of becoming a clinical specialist?**

Respondents reported that it is important for pharmacist clinical specialists to participate in continual training. As in any clinical practice, a certain level of expertise is expected of the practitioner. Continuing education and training is important to succeed in this environment. One pharmacist clinical specialist commented, “[These positions] require continuous studying/staying on top of current guidelines and literature.”

Some clinical specialists work in fast-paced environments requiring quick decisions, whereas others work in environments that are more structured and self-paced. The demands of the work environment should be considered when choosing a career path or practice that is suited to the pharmacist’s individual preference.

One respondent indicated that it is “necessary to have good communication skills and willingness to spend many extra hours in the workplace as well as outside the workplace, reading, learning, etc.”

Another pharmacist said students should be willing to take advantage of different opportunities, noting, “make sure the practice environment is right for you—which includes the hours and location.”

## Critical Factor Ratings

### Interaction With People

Interaction with people was cited by some pharmacist clinical specialists as the most appealing aspect of their work. As noted earlier, respondents reported that they spend 36% of their time in patient care areas.

= 6.6



### Conducting Physical Assessments

Some of the pharmacist clinical specialist positions will require much interaction with patients and involve conducting physical assessments, whereas other positions will lack these activities altogether.

= 3.2



### Interpreting Laboratory Values

It appears that many of the respondents have access to patient laboratory values. The difference in response between conducting physical assessments and interpreting laboratory values is striking. Notably, clinical specialists rated this factor higher than any other group in the survey.

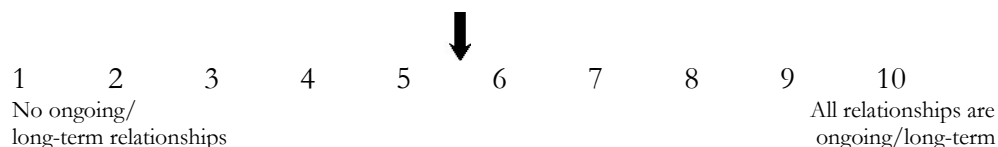
= 6.8



### Continuity of Relationships

The extent to which clinical specialists have ongoing or long-term relationships with patients varies by practice setting. For example, pharmacist clinical specialists in pediatrics may develop sustained relationships with children who have a chronic disease, whereas those in critical care may have contact with a patient for only a limited period of time. This range of continuity is reflected in the average being near the midpoint.

= 5.6



### Helping People

A pharmacist working in a poison information center or in an intensive care unit, for example, will have a direct impact on an individual's well being, whereas a pharmacist

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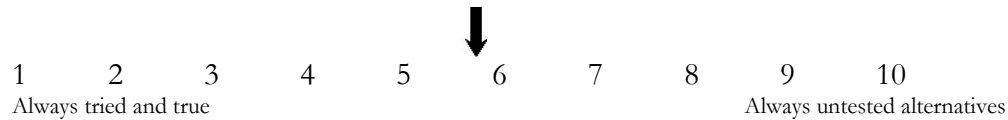
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### Problem Solving

Pharmacist clinical specialists responding to the survey indicated that they rely fairly equally on tried-and-true methods as well as untested alternatives to problem solving, scoring a mid-range 5.8. The extent to which the practice involves the use of algorithms or protocols and the variability of the patient population will influence the general approach to problem solving.

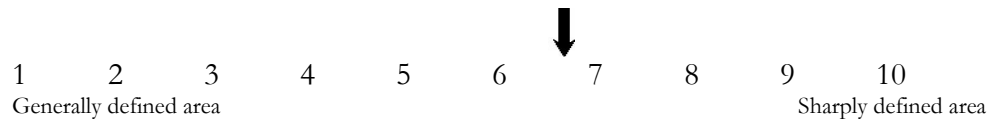
= 5.8



### Focus of Expertise

Not surprisingly, pharmacist clinical specialists indicated that they lean to the side of having a sharply defined area of expertise. Regardless of practice setting, there will always be general drug-related issues to handle in addition to those issues requiring specialized expertise.

= 6.7



### Innovative Thinking

Some clinical practice settings are well established and have highly defined expectations, duties, and responsibilities, whereas others will require innovative thinking to help shape and define the scope of practice. Pharmacist clinical specialists tended to agree that innovative thinking is used in their practice setting.

= 7.2



### Applying Scientific Knowledge

Pharmacist clinical specialists spend a significant portion of their time applying scientific knowledge in their area of expertise, giving this factor a rating of 7.6. The specialized training and expertise pays dividends in being able to apply this knowledge as an important part of their work.

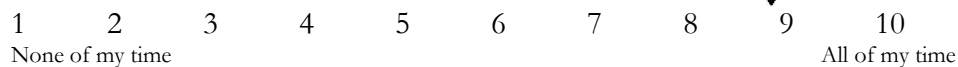
= 7.6



### Applying Medical Knowledge

Pharmacist clinical specialists spend an even greater amount of time applying medical knowledge in their field. This ranking was the highest for this group.

= 8.9



### Creating New Knowledge by Conducting Research

Pharmacist clinical specialists spend most of their time practicing in their area of expertise, providing services and caring for patients. There is opportunity to conduct research but it occupies only 6% of their time.

= 4.0



### Management/Supervision of Others

A low mid-range response from participants shows that this group is not very involved in the management and supervisory responsibilities of others. Depending on the practice setting, clinical specialist pharmacists generally work with peers and other health professionals. Their level of supervision of others depends upon staffing levels and extent of teaching conducted at their institution.

= 4.1



### Management/Supervision of a Business

Many of the respondents indicated that they spend little to no time managing a business. Only 6% of respondents' time is spent on business-related activities.

= 3.4



### Pressure/Stress

Respondents indicated that they experience pressure/stress at the mid-range level. All pharmacists experience some stress in their workday, which comes with responsibility. The types of pressures and stresses vary depending upon the practice environment.

= 6.9



### Work Schedule

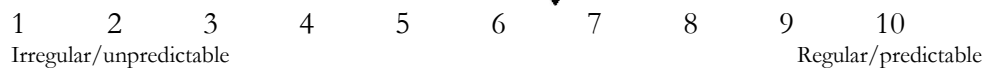
Pharmacist clinical specialists often work regular and predictable schedules. There may be

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“on call” responsibilities, rotating shifts in some situations, and at times long workdays, which are predictable.

= 6.6



### Part-Time Opportunities

Generally, it is difficult to specialize and become an expert in a clinical area on a part-time basis. After becoming a specialist, pharmacists can take on part-time and consultant opportunities.

= 3.2



### Job-Sharing Opportunities

Job-sharing is not a common practice in this field as reinforced by the low range ranking of this factor. This was the lowest ranked factor in this group

= 2.6



### Exit/Re-entry Opportunities

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

= 4.1



### 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.

= 7.1



### Leisure/Family Time

A regular and predictable work schedule allows individuals to enjoy free time for leisure/family activities. Not unique to specialists, keeping up with the literature and other professional development activities can take away from this free time, but generally can be

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### 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. Pharmacist clinical specialists indicated that the opportunity exists for professional involvement in such events. These specialists are often invited to speak on topics in their area of expertise. In addition, they are typically involved in regional or national meetings of associations or societies in their specific practice area.

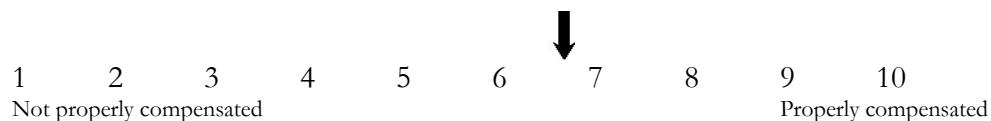
= 7.2



### Income

Pharmacist salaries have increased significantly in the recent past, largely as a result of the pharmacist shortage. Pharmacist salaries in the institutional setting, where most pharmacist clinical specialists work, lag behind salaries in the community setting. Despite this, pharmacist clinical specialists indicated that they were properly compensated.

= 6.7



### Benefits (vacation, health, retirement)

Benefits often go hand-in-hand with salary. Most of the respondents indicated that they receive a better than average benefits package.

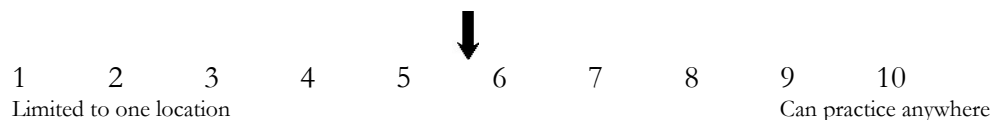
= 7.9



### Geographic Location

The highly focused practices of pharmacist clinical specialists may limit geographic possibilities where other traditional opportunities exist. While most urban areas have positions, there is a growing need in rural areas for clinical specialists.

= 5.7



### Working Remotely

There is little opportunity for a clinical specialist pharmacist to work remotely due to the need for access to patient charts, working as a team, and other necessarily on-site responsibilities.

=3.9



### Autonomy

As a licensed professional, pharmacists have been granted certain authorities and accepted certain responsibilities; as a result, pharmacists generally have autonomy within the professional scope of practice. Pharmacists in this setting indicated an upper range rating of 8.3 for this factor giving it the second highest ranking for clinical specialists.

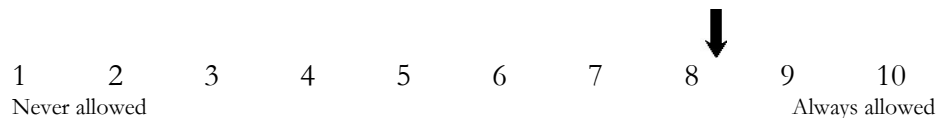
= 8.3



### Self-Worth

Pharmacists practicing in clinical specialties are often pursuing careers that fulfill personal and professional ideals. There is general agreement among these pharmacists that their practice creates self-worth.

= 8.2



### Future Focus

Depending on the position, clinical specialist pharmacists can be on the cutting edge of science in their respective disciplines. Although day-to-day decisions are based on the present, the underlying focus for many of these pharmacists is on what's new and what's on the horizon.

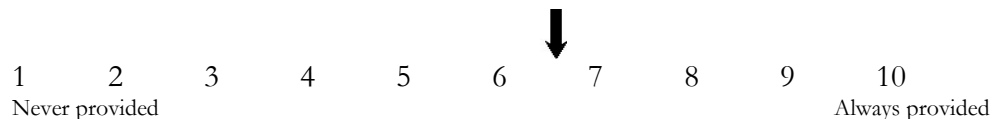
= 7.1



### Professional Prestige

Pharmacists practicing in a specific clinical area have opportunities to make a name for themselves through achievements in practice, research, or other scholarly activities. Pharmacists in clinical practice are often called upon to share their expertise with other pharmacists through continuing education programs or other venues. As a result, they become better known and often hold a more prestigious position in the profession.

= 6.6







### Mean Scores for Critical Factors

1. Interaction with people	6.6
2. Performing physical assessments	3.2
3. Interpreting laboratory values	6.8
4. Continuity of relationships	5.6
5. Extent to which effect is direct	6.7
6. Collaboration with other professionals	7.8
7. Educating other professionals	5.7
8. Variety of daily activities	6.5
9. Multiple task handling	6.9
10. Problem solving	5.8
11. Focus of expertise	6.7
12. Innovative thinking	7.2
13. Applying scientific knowledge	7.6
14. Applying medical knowledge	8.9
15. Creating new knowledge by conducting research	4.0
16. Managing others	4.1
17. Managing business operations	3.4
18. Pressure/Stress	6.9
19. Work schedule	6.6
20. Part time opportunities	3.2
21. Job sharing	2.6
22. Exit and re-entry	4.1
23. Parental leave	7.1
24. Free time for leisure/family activities	6.8
25. Job security	7.5
26. Opportunities for advancement	6.0
27. Opportunities for leadership development	6.2
28. Community prestige	6.5
29. Professional involvement	7.2
30. Income	6.7
31. Benefits (vacation, health, retirement)	7.9
32. Geographic location	5.7
33. Working Remotely	3.9
34. Autonomy	8.3
35. Self-Worth	8.2
36. Future focus	7.1
37. Professional prestige	6.6
38. Unique practice environment	8.2
39. Advanced degree	5.3
40. Entrepreneurial opportunity	3.7
41. Additional training	8.0
42. Interacting with co-workers	8.0
43. Travel	2.3
44. Writing	4.2
45. Working with teams	7.4

**Reference**

Schommer JC, *APhA Career Pathway Evaluation Program for Pharmacy Professionals 2012 Pharmacist Profile Survey*. February 2013.

**Professional Organizations**

American Academy of Clinical Toxicology (AACT)  
6728 Old McLean Village Drive, McLean, VA 22101  
Tel: 703-556-9222 Fax: 703-556-8729  
[www.clintox.org](http://www.clintox.org)

American Association of Poison Control Centers (AAPCC)  
3201 New Mexico Avenue, Suite 310, Washington, DC 20016  
Tel: 202-362-7217  
[www.aapcc.org](http://www.aapcc.org)

American College of Clinical Pharmacy (ACCP)  
13000 W. 87<sup>th</sup> Street Parkway, Lenexa, KS 66215  
Tel: 913-492-3311 Fax: 913-492-0088  
[www.accp.com](http://www.accp.com)

American Pharmacists Association (APhA)  
2215 Constitution Ave, NW, Washington, DC 20037  
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.com](http://www.ashp.com)

Board of Pharmaceutical Specialties (BPS)  
2215 Constitution Ave, NW, Washington, DC 20037  
Tel: 202-429-7591 Fax: 202-429-6304  
[www.bpsweb.org](http://www.bpsweb.org)

College of Psychiatric and Neurologic Pharmacists (CPNP)  
8055 O Street, Lincoln, NE 68510  
Tel: 402-476-1677 Fax: 888-551-7617  
[www.cpn.org](http://www.cpn.org)

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](http://www.ncpanet.org)