

## Community Health Center

### Background

Community health center (CHC) pharmacists play an important role in providing needed health care services and information to the underserved. These pharmacists fulfill the medication and information needs of patients in an outpatient setting and advise health care professionals working with outpatients at CHCs and clinics. Working with a broad range of patient ages and disease states, these pharmacists typically have full access to medical records. In addition, direct patient care is seen as a very strong component in many of the practice environments. The scope of practice and responsibilities in CHCs varies significantly by individual location. Pharmacists can be in a CHC with or without a dispensing component.

CHC pharmacists have diverse responsibilities in the health care system. Twenty-three percent of their time is spent dispensing medications (including the associated patient counseling). An additional 18% is spent on business and department management, followed by 18% for patient care services (e.g., medication therapy management, disease management), and 8% for personnel management.

Pharmacists in these settings also conduct wellness and preventive health programs. Some states allow CHC pharmacists to serve as primary care providers working within collaborative practice agreements with physicians following agreed upon protocols. This type of protocol may include prescribing authority. One pharmacist commented that students and other practitioners interested in CHC pharmacy should understand that “working in community health is rewarding and meaningful—there are opportunities to really impact the quality of care patients receive.”

### Characteristics

Twenty-six CHC pharmacists responded to the 2012 *APhA Career Pathway Evaluation Program* survey. Sixty-four percent of respondents held PharmD degrees. Five percent indicated an advanced degree (MA, MS, MBS PhD, or other). Twenty-eight percent had been through a residency program (nearly double from 2007 data), 65% had been through a certificate training program (significantly increased from the 15% reported in 2007), and 10% reported having been through some form of other training.

Respondents' average age was 44 years old. Seventy-three percent of respondents were female. Sixty-eight percent indicated some type of management role. Income data show just over half (60%) earn between \$90,000–\$120,000 per year. The average time worked per week was 42.4 hours.

An overwhelming majority of respondents indicated that they were satisfied with their work, with 68% indicating “extremely satisfied” and 28% indicating “somewhat satisfied.” Similarly, most respondents indicated that they felt the work was quite challenging, with 56%

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indicating “extremely challenging” and 32% indicating “somewhat challenging.”

### **Insider’s Perspective**

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

Owing to the variety of work environments, duties, and responsibilities, the most appealing aspects of the role vary with the setting. Many respondents indicated that “counseling patients” and “direct patient care” were the two most appealing aspects of their work. A number indicated that providing services to those who most need it is very rewarding.

One respondent expressed enjoyment in having “connections with providers and patients so I can be open with both in discussing the patient’s health”

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

Competing for scarce resources was listed respondents as one of the least appealing aspects of their work. One respondent wrote of concern for “dealing with insufficient grant monies to further the missions of our CHC.” Other pharmacists indicated that administrative and regulatory duties are the least appealing aspects they encounter. Also cited were language barriers and paperwork as areas that are of concern.

#### **What advice should students and practitioners consider when selecting the option of becoming a CHC pharmacist?**

One theme was repeated by respondents about their career choice: many asked that students and practitioners be open to the idea of working in a CHC. Many advised visiting a variety of centers to see how different they are. In addition, respondents commented on the “clinical nature” of the practice and the ability to use “communication skills.”

One respondent gave the following words of advice: “Consider working within training programs for other health care providers. Strong communication skills in the language of another profession will open doors.”

## Critical Factor Ratings

### **Interaction With Patients**

Interaction with patients was cited by some pharmacists as one of the most appealing aspects of their work. Whether counseling patients or advising other health care professionals, working with people is a core characteristic of a CHC pharmacist's role. = 7.3



### **Conducting Physical Assessments**

Some of the pharmacist positions will require much interaction with patients and involve conducting physical assessments, whereas other positions will lack these activities altogether. Quick evaluation of symptoms and other indicators can be helpful in directing the patient's therapy. However, respondents indicated that a minimal amount of time was spent on these assessments, with a mean score of only 3.0 = 3.0



### **Interpreting Laboratory Values**

Some of the respondents have access to patient laboratory values through the patient's medical records. However, even with this access, the group rated this factor in the low range. = 4.3



### **Continuity of Relationships**

CHC pharmacists have the opportunity to get to know their patients and other health professionals in depth. They develop a working knowledge of their patients and their related drug therapies. In addition, they must maintain professional relationships with all the health care professionals providing care for their patient population. Continuity of relationships was ranked higher than interacting with people. = 6.8



### **Helping People**

Patient counseling is one of the most appealing aspects of CHC pharmacy. There are many pharmacists who cite helping people as the primary factor for choosing pharmacy as a

career. As with the previous “people” categories, helping people ranked fairly high with a 6.4, showing that the pharmacists who responded feel they have a positive effect on the overall care of their patients in a direct way. A respondent from Iowa summed up the thoughts of many others indicating “daily opportunity to directly make a positive impact on someone’s health.”

=6.4



### Collaboration With Other Professionals

As mentioned previously, some respondents indicated that one of the most appealing aspects is interacting with other providers. One pharmacist found “the work environment and the ability to collaborate with physicians” to be enjoyable. Another stated having “personal relationships with all members of the health care team (e.g., MD, PA, RN, lab [workers]).”

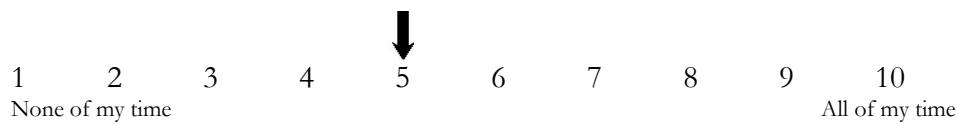
= 6.9



### Educating Other Professionals

CHC pharmacy is an outstanding setting for pharmacists to work side-by-side with other health care professionals. CHC pharmacists can educate other professionals on medication use, improving adherence, and effective therapies. The following non-inclusive list provides an example of the areas that respondents work in or with: oncology, HIV, diabetes, smoking cessation, and sexually transmitted diseases.

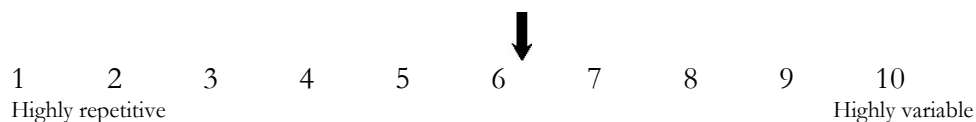
= 5.0



### Variety of Daily Activities

The day-to-day workload of a CHC pharmacist is often dependent on the specific setting. As a result, there is often a good deal of variety in their practices in centers that are more general in nature. Centers that have specialty clinics may not provide as much variety as others.

= 6.1



### Multiple Task Handling

Successful CHC pharmacists must perform a variety of tasks at any one time. Time management is an important skill for this group because CHC pharmacists indicated that many tasks require their attention at any one time.

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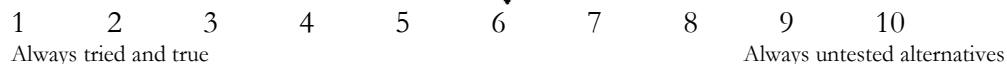
= 7.6



### Problem Solving

In the CHC pharmacy setting, some problems encountered are complex and may require highly developed problem-solving skills. At other times, administrative or insurance issues may be resolved with more standard solutions. As a result, respondents were mid-range in their responses. 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.

= 6.1



### Focus of Expertise

CHC respondents were in the mid-range response for this factor. This response again takes into account the variety of tasks required by CHC pharmacists and the diversity of roles in individual settings.

= 5.0



### Innovative Thinking

Some specialty practice settings are well established and have well-defined expectations, duties, and responsibilities, whereas others will require innovative thinking to help shape and define the specialty practice. In response to the question, "To what extent does your practice involve generating new ideas (innovative thinking) pertaining to pharmacy?", CHC respondents average a 6.4 response indicating that their practice can provide the opportunity to test new and innovative approaches to drug therapy management or other issues encountered.

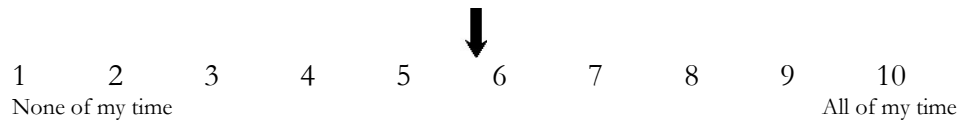
= 6.4



### Applying Scientific Knowledge

Applying scientific knowledge received a moderate score of 5.8.

= 5.8



### Applying Medical Knowledge

Respondents spend an even greater proportion of their time applying medical knowledge in their field. Roles that apply this knowledge can include patient counseling, physical assessment, drug therapy reviews, and collaboration with other professionals.

= 7.6



### Creating New Knowledge by Conducting Research

CHC pharmacy is an example of a setting designed for the application of knowledge. The results of pharmaceutical research and studies are used to improve patient outcomes by means of protocol development. Limited opportunities exist to conduct extensive research in the pharmacy setting. However, for the most part, this setting is where knowledge is applied and used within specific drug therapy protocols, reflected by the 2.5 rating.

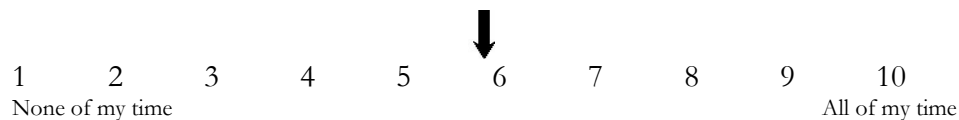
= 2.5



### Management/Supervision of Others

In CHC pharmacy, the majority of management or supervisory tasks are the responsibility of the pharmacy manager. In many settings, the pharmacists are responsible for the conduct and practice in the pharmacy, and they must supervise a variety of pharmacy and, in some cases, nursing personnel.

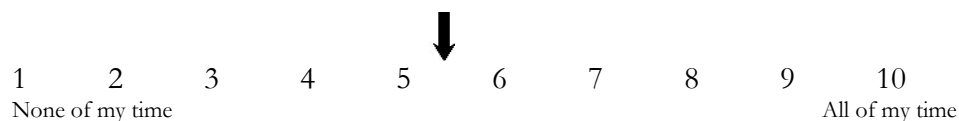
= 5.8



### Management/Supervision of a Business

Many of the respondents indicated that they spend slightly less time on business management versus personnel management. Eighteen percent of respondents' time is spent on business-related activities.

= 5.4



### Pressure/Stress

CHC pharmacists often serve as an easily accessible member of the health care team. This can be a stressful practice setting at times and requires effective understanding of process management as an integral part of the role. Even with this said, respondents indicated that they are mid-range when it comes to stress/pressure.

= 6.7



### Work Schedule

CHC pharmacists feel that they have a relatively regular or predictable work schedule. Most settings have set hours of operations and patients usually make specific appointments.

= 8.3



### Part-Time Opportunities

There appear to be limited part-time opportunities in CHC although this is dependent on the geographic location and the availability of pharmacists for full-time work.

= 4.0



### Job-Sharing Opportunities

Job-sharing is not a common practice in this field, which is reinforced by the lower range ranking of this factor

= 3.4



### Exit/Re-entry Opportunities

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

= 4.7



### Parental Leave Opportunities

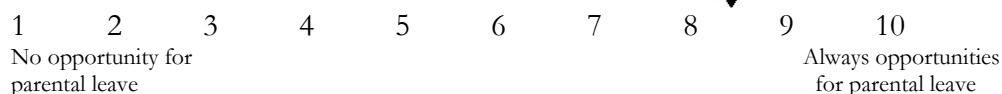
Parental leave opportunities ranked higher than others in the areas of work-related options.

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Most employers provide the opportunity for parental leave.

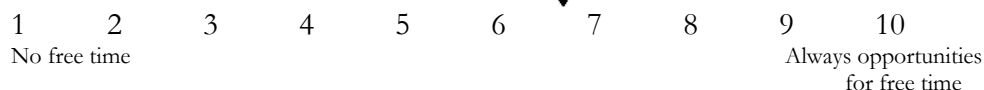
= 8.4



### Leisure/Family Time

With a work schedule that is more regular and predictable, CHC pharmacists are better able to plan for leisure time or time with their families.

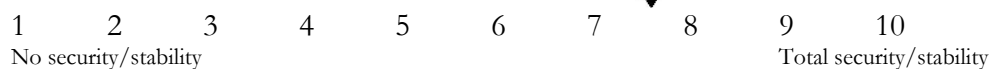
= 6.7



### Job Security

Receiving the second-highest score in this profile, pharmacists in CHC agree that they enjoy adequate job security.

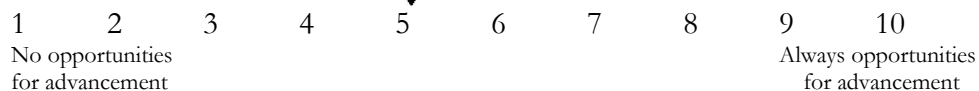
= 7.6



### Opportunities for Advancement

There is wide variation among different CHC practice sites and how the infrastructure is designed. The diversity of activities and the ability to perform different functions provide some opportunities for pharmacists to advance.

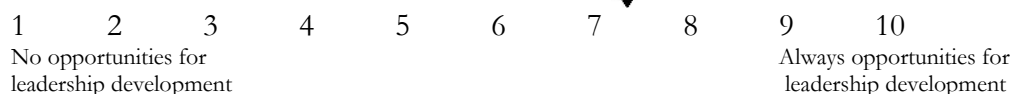
= 5.1



### Opportunities for Leadership Development

Effective leadership and practice management skills are necessary for the delivery of pharmaceutical services in a manner consistent with needs for continuous quality improvement in patient care outcomes. Respondents felt that there are many opportunities for them to develop leadership skills within their practices

= 7.3

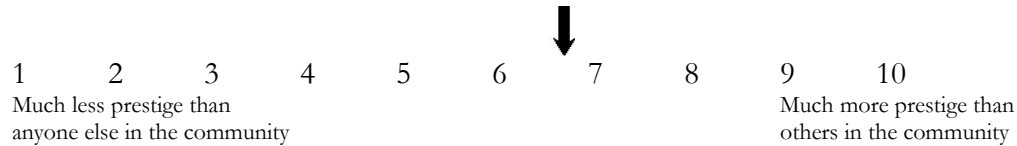




### Community Prestige

CHC pharmacists enjoy the respect and prestige associated with their practice setting. As previously mentioned, some are highly trained with specialized skills and have high levels of patient interaction. Others may become well known within the neighborhoods where they work and be highly regarded by the public.

= 6.7



### Professional Involvement

Active involvement in pharmacy organizations and events creates opportunities for professional development and the sharing of ideas and knowledge among peers. The extent to which a CHC pharmacist gets involved is largely a personal decision. These pharmacists generally indicated ample opportunity to get involved.

= 8.0



### Income

With a 7.5 rating, respondents feel more often than not that they are properly compensated for their work.

= 7.5



### Benefits (vacation, health, retirement)

Benefits often go hand-in-hand with salary. As with most career paths, a factor in overall job satisfaction may be the benefits. CHC pharmacists are sought after members of the profession and they are usually offered competitive benefit packages. This was the tied for the highest rated response for this group.

= 8.5



### Geographic Location

CHC practice settings yielded a lower-range score of 4.1. Nondispensing clinics are most often affiliated with institutions, and are less common in rural areas.





### Additional Training

Respondents rated this factor the highest in the profile as they seek additional training and experience. It may not take up a great deal of time, but it is a necessary component of keeping up on clinical and patient care activities.

= 6.6



### Interacting With Colleagues

As mentioned earlier, CHC pharmacists like being members of the overall health care team. Respondents indicated that they tend to interact with coworkers on a regular basis.

= 7.2



### Travel

Respondents, for the most part, have lower needs to travel for their day-to-day activities. However, attending state, national, or international meetings do provide some travel opportunities.

= 2.7



### Writing

Respondents were in the lower range regarding writing.

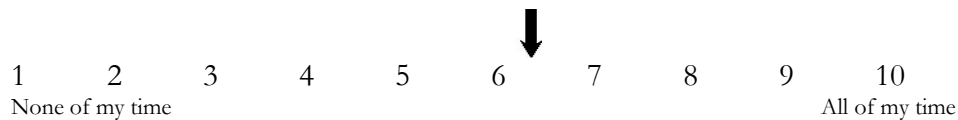
= 3.2



### Working With Teams

Even though interacting with other professionals was one of the most appealing aspects of CHC practice, respondents indicated working with teams as a mid-range response.

= 6.3



### Mean Scores for Critical Factors

1. Interaction with people	<b>7.3</b>
2. Performing physical assessments	<b>3.0</b>
3. Interpreting laboratory values	<b>4.3</b>
4. Continuity of relationships	<b>6.8</b>
5. Extent to which effect is direct	<b>6.4</b>
6. Collaboration with other professionals	<b>6.9</b>
7. Educating other professionals	<b>5.0</b>
8. Variety of daily activities	<b>6.1</b>
9. Multiple task handling	<b>7.6</b>
10. Problem solving	<b>6.1</b>
11. Focus of expertise	<b>5.0</b>
12. Innovative thinking	<b>6.4</b>
13. Applying scientific knowledge	<b>5.8</b>
14. Applying medical knowledge	<b>7.6</b>
15. Creating new knowledge by conducting research	<b>2.5</b>
16. Managing others	<b>5.8</b>
17. Managing business operations	<b>5.4</b>
18. Pressure/Stress	<b>6.7</b>
19. Work schedule	<b>8.3</b>
20. Part time opportunities	<b>4.0</b>
21. Job sharing	<b>3.4</b>
22. Exit and re-entry	<b>4.7</b>
23. Parental leave	<b>8.4</b>
24. Free time for leisure/family activities	<b>6.7</b>
25. Job security	<b>7.6</b>
26. Opportunities for advancement	<b>5.1</b>
27. Opportunities for leadership development	<b>7.3</b>
28. Community prestige	<b>6.7</b>
29. Professional involvement	<b>8.0</b>
30. Income	<b>7.5</b>
31. Benefits (vacation, health, retirement)	<b>8.5</b>
32. Geographic location	<b>4.1</b>
33. Working Remotely	<b>3.0</b>
34. Autonomy	<b>7.1</b>
35. Self-Worth	<b>8.1</b>
36. Future focus	<b>6.9</b>
37. Professional prestige	<b>6.0</b>
38. Unique practice environment	<b>7.2</b>
39. Advanced degree	<b>4.6</b>
40. Entrepreneurial opportunity	<b>4.3</b>
41. Additional training	<b>6.6</b>
42. Interacting with co-workers	<b>8.5</b>
43. Travel	<b>2.7</b>
44. Writing	<b>3.2</b>
45. Working with teams	<b>6.3</b>

**Reference**

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

**Professional Organizations**

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