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. Thirty-four percent of their time is spent dispensing medications (including the associated patient counseling). An additional 17% is spent on business and department management, followed by 13% for patient care services (e.g., medication therapy management, disease management), and 6% 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 from New Mexico 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

Fifty-three CHC pharmacists responded to the 2007 APhA Career Pathway Evaluation Program survey. Forty-five percent of respondents held an entry-level pharmacy degree, and 39% held PharmD degrees. Ten percent indicated an advanced degree (MA, MS, MBS PhD, or other). Fifteen percent had been through a residency program, 15% had been through a certificate training program, and 11% reported having been through some form of other training.

Respondents’ average age was 47 years old. Just over half (53%) of respondents were female. Eighty-three percent indicated some type of management role. Income data show just over half (59%) earn between $80,000–$100,000, while 41% earn $100,000 or more per year. The average time worked per week was 41.6 hours. Respondents represented 21 states.

An overwhelming majority of respondents indicated that they were satisfied with their work, with 72% indicating “extremely satisfied” and 26% indicating “somewhat satisfied.” Similarly, most respondents indicated that they felt the work was quite challenging, with 49% indicating “extremely challenging” and 45% 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. Twenty-eight percent equally indicated that “counseling patients” and “direct patient care” were the two most appealing aspects of their work. A smaller percentage (13%) indicated that working with a health care team was the most appealing.

A respondent from West Virginia expressed enjoyment in the “team approach to practice, interaction with physicians, feeling valued as a member of the health care team.” Another respondent from Kentucky enjoyed the “ability to help patients get care they need but sometimes cannot afford.”

What aspects of the job are least appealing?
Competing for scarce resources was listed by 13% of the respondents as one of the least appealing aspects of their work. One respondent from Illinois wrote of concern for “dealing with insufficient grant monies to further the missions of our CHC.” An additional 10% indicated that administrative and regulatory duties are the least appealing aspects they encounter.

Six percent also cited language barriers and paperwork as two additional areas that are of concern. One respondent from Alabama indicated “time needed for paperwork for JCAHO.”

Several respondents also stated general concerns about the physical space for the pharmacy within the center as well as inadequate space for patient counseling and care.

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: 10% 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, the ability to use “communication skills,” and the ability to “contribute to knowledge of patients.”

One respondent from Texas captured what many were indicating: “Give CHC a chance—it can be so rewarding! Patients are so appreciative of even the smallest things.” Another respondent from Arizona liked having “prescriptive authority.”
Critical Factor Ratings

Interaction With Patients
Interaction with patients was cited by some pharmacists as one of the most appealing aspects of their work. Respondents reported that they spend 47% of their time in patient care areas. Whether counseling patients or advising other health care professionals, working with people is a core characteristic of a CHC pharmacist’s role. Respondents rated this factor the highest across all profiles.

\[ \mu = 7.2 \]
\[ \sigma = 2.0 \]

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 2.7

\[ \mu = 2.7 \]
\[ \sigma = 2.2 \]

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.

\[ \mu = 3.1 \]
\[ \sigma = 2.5 \]

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.

\[ \mu = 7.4 \]
\[ \sigma = 2.2 \]
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 high with a 7.3, 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.”

\[ \text{All effect is indirect} \quad \sigma = 2.2 \]

\[ \text{All effect is direct} \]

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

\[ \text{None of my time} \quad \text{All of my time} \quad \sigma = 2.1 \]

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.

\[ \text{None of my time} \quad \text{All of my time} \quad \sigma = 2.5 \]
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.

\[ \mu = 6.2 \]
\[ \sigma = 2.2 \]

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.

\[ \mu = 7.0 \]
\[ \sigma = 2.3 \]

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.

\[ \mu = 5.3 \]
\[ \sigma = 1.7 \]

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.

\[ \mu = 5.7 \]
\[ \sigma = 2.2 \]
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 6.8 response indicating that their practice can provide the opportunity to test new and innovative approaches to drug therapy management or other issues encountered.

\[ = 6.8 \]
\[ \sigma = 1.9 \]

Applying Scientific Knowledge
Applying scientific knowledge received a relatively high score of 6.3.

\[ = 6.3 \]
\[ \sigma = 2.3 \]

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.

\[ = 7.6 \]
\[ \sigma = 1.9 \]

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 2.7 rating.

\[ = 2.7 \]
\[ \sigma = 1.9 \]
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.

\[
\begin{align*}
&= 7.1 \\
&\sigma = 2.2
\end{align*}
\]

Management/Supervision of a Business
Many of the respondents indicated that they spend slightly less time on business management versus personnel management. Seventeen percent of respondents’ time is spent on business-related activities.

\[
\begin{align*}
&= 6.4 \\
&\sigma = 2.6
\end{align*}
\]

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.

\[
\begin{align*}
&= 6.3 \\
&\sigma = 2.1
\end{align*}
\]

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.

\[
\begin{align*}
&= 8.1 \\
&\sigma = 2.4
\end{align*}
\]
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. There is wide variation among settings, reflected by the high standard deviation.

\[ \mu = 4.7 \]
\[ \sigma = 3.1 \]

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

\[ \mu = 2.9 \]
\[ \sigma = 2.5 \]

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

\[ \mu = 5.3 \]
\[ \sigma = 2.9 \]

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.

\[ \mu = 6.8 \]
\[ \sigma = 3.2 \]
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.

\[ \mu = 7.2 \]
\[ \sigma = 2.4 \]

Job Security
Receiving the second-highest score in this profile, pharmacists in CHC agree that they enjoy adequate job security. The current national pharmacist shortage provides relative job security to all pharmacists.

\[ \mu = 8.4 \]
\[ \sigma = 1.3 \]

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.

\[ \mu = 5.1 \]
\[ \sigma = 2.7 \]

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.

\[ \mu = 6.9 \]
\[ \sigma = 2.4 \]
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.

\[ = 7.0 \]
\[ \sigma = 2.2 \]

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.

\[ = 7.9 \]
\[ \sigma = 2.3 \]

Income
Pharmacists in general benefit from the nationwide pharmacist shortage with increased levels of income. CHC pharmacists however indicated that their salary range was slightly lower than other settings. This is dependent on the center and salary demands. With a 6.6 rating, respondents feel more often than not that they are properly compensated for their work.

\[ = 6.6 \]
\[ \sigma = 2.6 \]

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 third-highest response for this group.

\[ = 8.2 \]
\[ \sigma = 2.1 \]
**Geographic Location**
CHC practice settings exist across the country and yielded a mid-range score of 6.2. Nondispensing clinics are most often affiliated with institutions, and are less common in rural areas.

\[
\begin{array}{cccccccccc}
1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & 5 & 6 & 7 & 8 & 9 & 10 \\
\text{Limited to one location} & & & & & & & & & \text{Can practice anywhere}
\end{array}
\]

\[
\begin{array}{cccccccccc}
\text{= 6.2} \\
\sigma = 3.4
\end{array}
\]

**Autonomy**
CHC respondents enjoy the autonomy that occurs in this practice setting. Pharmacists generally work within existing protocols and they can work independent of another health care professional. Pharmacists are free to practice within their scope.

\[
\begin{array}{cccccccccc}
1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & 5 & 6 & 7 & 8 & 9 & 10 \\
\text{No autonomy} & & & & & & & & & \text{Total autonomy}
\end{array}
\]

\[
\begin{array}{cccccccccc}
\text{= 7.4} \\
\sigma = 1.8
\end{array}
\]

**Self-Worth**
CHC pharmacists believe their practice setting provides the opportunity to create personal value and positive outcomes. They are respected members of interdisciplinary teams that provide care for specific patient populations.

\[
\begin{array}{cccccccccc}
1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & 5 & 6 & 7 & 8 & 9 & 10 \\
\text{Never allowed} & & & & & & & & & \text{Always allowed}
\end{array}
\]

\[
\begin{array}{cccccccccc}
\text{= 7.7} \\
\sigma = 1.8
\end{array}
\]

**Future Focus**
Some tasks in the CHC can be viewed as very immediate-focused duties. Dispensing of prescription medications is more a “now” task rather than “sometime in the future.” However, pharmacists in this setting are involved in the future development of their clinics by planning to adjust for increased patient contact and in ideas on how to further develop the center’s reach. Pharmacists indicated that they have an above average opportunity to focus on the future, with a score of 6.9.

\[
\begin{array}{cccccccccc}
1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & 5 & 6 & 7 & 8 & 9 & 10 \\
\text{Focus on immediate task} & & & & & & & & & \text{Focus on future}
\end{array}
\]

\[
\begin{array}{cccccccccc}
\text{= 6.9} \\
\sigma = 1.2
\end{array}
\]
Professional Prestige
CHC pharmacy offers many opportunities to make a significant contribution to pharmacy. Recognition may be gained by clinical innovation, teaching, research, and professional involvement. Pharmacists in this setting believe opportunities to gain professional prestige are available, reflected by the 6.8 rating.

\[ \begin{align*} 
\text{Never provided} & \quad 1 \quad 2 \quad 3 \quad 4 \quad 5 \quad 6 \quad 7 \quad 8 \quad 9 \quad 10 \\
\text{Always provided} & \quad 7 \quad 8 \quad 9 \quad 10 \\
\text{Rating} & = 6.8 \\
\text{Standard Deviation} & = 2.7 
\end{align*} \]

Unique Practice Environment
The CHC setting is unique because of the high levels of patient interaction and in some cases, specialized patient services offered. Pharmacists enjoy their practice because they can have a direct effect on patient outcomes.

\[ \begin{align*} 
\text{Not at all unique} & \quad 1 \quad 2 \quad 3 \quad 4 \quad 5 \quad 6 \quad 7 \quad 8 \quad 9 \quad 10 \\
\text{Extremely unique} & \quad 8 \quad 9 \quad 10 \\
\text{Rating} & = 8.1 \\
\text{Standard Deviation} & = 1.7 
\end{align*} \]

Advanced Degree
Advanced degrees are not typically required in CHC pharmacies. Those who do pursue advance degrees may seek management positions. For nondispensing sites, however, an advanced degree is often required.

\[ \begin{align*} 
\text{Advanced degree not required} & \quad 1 \quad 2 \quad 3 \quad 4 \quad 5 \quad 6 \quad 7 \quad 8 \quad 9 \quad 10 \\
\text{Advanced degree required} & \quad 8 \quad 9 \quad 10 \\
\text{Rating} & = 3.6 \\
\text{Standard Deviation} & = 3.3 
\end{align*} \]

Entrepreneurial Opportunity
Entrepreneurial opportunity is limited in CHC pharmacy depending on the organization’s size and the type of programs and services being developed. Within specialized clinics there may be the chance to develop new disease state management and other patient care programs.

\[ \begin{align*} 
\text{Not at all} & \quad 1 \quad 2 \quad 3 \quad 4 \quad 5 \quad 6 \quad 7 \quad 8 \quad 9 \quad 10 \\
\text{Extremely} & \quad 8 \quad 9 \quad 10 \\
\text{Rating} & = 4.5 \\
\text{Standard Deviation} & = 2.7 
\end{align*} \]
**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.

\[ = 8.9 \]
\[ \sigma = 2.1 \]

**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.

\[ = 8.2 \]
\[ \sigma = 1.9 \]

**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.

\[ = 2.9 \]
\[ \sigma = 1.9 \]

**Writing**
Respondents were in the lower range regarding writing.

\[ = 3.5 \]
\[ \sigma = 1.9 \]

**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.

\[ = 5.2 \]
\[ \sigma = 2.7 \]
“On Call”
Respondents indicated a low “on call” need for the positions.

\[ = 2.2 \]
\[ \sigma = 2.3 \]

Work on Holidays
CHC pharmacists tend not to work on holidays at their place of employment. In fact, this was the lowest-rated factor for this profile.

\[ = 1.2 \]
\[ \sigma = 0.5 \]

Work on Weekends
Responses were similar to the statement above.

\[ = 1.3 \]
\[ \sigma = 0.7 \]

Presentations
CHC pharmacists indicated that they occasionally provide presentations as an in-service while at other times are invited to speak at a school of pharmacy or community group.

\[ = 3.3 \]
\[ \sigma = 2.0 \]
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mean Scores for Critical Factors</th>
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<td>3. Interpreting Laboratory Values</td>
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<td>7. Educating Other Professionals</td>
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<td>40. Additional Training</td>
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<td>41. Interacting With Colleagues</td>
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<td>43. Writing</td>
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<td>1.2</td>
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Reference


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

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

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.