

## Government/Federal Pharmacy

### Background

Pharmacists in government/federal pharmacy are employees of local, state, or federal government agencies. These could include government units such as municipal health clinics, state Medicaid agencies, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), branches of the U.S. Military including the Army, Navy, and Air Force, the U.S. Public Health Service (PHS), and other related organizations. The PHS oversees a number of agencies, including, but not limited to, the Coast Guard, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA), the Indian Health Service (IHS), and the National Institutes of Health (NIH). Government/federal pharmacists may be considered active military or have a civilian appointment depending on their place of employment and their position held.

Opportunities for pharmacists in the government are varied and cover a wide scope of practices including clinical, research, and administrative roles. In accord with their practice settings, these pharmacists exhibit considerable diversity in their duties and responsibilities. The broad range includes providing direct patient care through MTM services, dispensing and other drug-related activities, managing and administering pharmacy departments within their government branch, reviewing new drug applications and health administration, and many others. A focus on local, state, and national emergency preparedness is another component of some positions in this field.

Seventeen percent of their time is spent on business/organization/department management. Only 12% of their time is spent on medication dispensing (including associated patient counseling). Project/case management takes 11% of federal pharmacists time and medication management and patient management services comprise of 8% of their time each.

### Characteristics

A total of 137 pharmacists responded to the 2012 *APhA Career Pathway Evaluation Program* survey in this area. Fifty-nine percent of the respondents have a bachelor of pharmacy degree and sixty-three percent have either an entry level or post BS PharmD degree. Fourteen percent held a non-pharmacy baccalaureate and 50% had an advanced degree (MA, MS, MBA, PhD, or other.) Also, 27% report completing a residency, 7% completed a fellowship, and another 42% completed some type of certificate training. Thirteen percent reported completing other training.

The respondents' average age was 45 years old. Slightly over half of the respondents (53%) were male. Over half of the respondents (61%) reported that they are in management positions. Annual income data indicated that 24% have an income less than \$100,000. Fifty-three percent had an income of \$100,000 - \$130,000 in 2011.

The majority of respondents indicated that they were satisfied with their work, with 51% indicating they are "extremely satisfied" and 39% indicating "somewhat satisfied." Over half

of the pharmacists (52%) find their career “extremely challenging” and another 38% responded “somewhat challenging.”

### **Insider’s Perspective**

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

Many of the government/federal pharmacy respondents report that flexibility in the work schedule and hours is the most appealing facet of their work. Some respondents indicated that this impacts their quality of life in a positive way. Other positive aspects included the diversity of daily activities, the opportunity to serve, living overseas, opportunities outside of pharmacy, and working with patients and other professionals. Many also stated an appreciation for the opportunity to serve the country and our veterans.

One respondent appreciated that “The work we do as public health pharmacists affects a population as opposed to individuals in the classical pharmacy setting.”

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

Many of the respondents indicated the “bureaucracy” was the least appealing aspect of their work. Although some cited travel opportunities as most appealing, others found this to be the least appealing aspect. Notably, there were several respondents who answered “none” or “nothing,” for this question.

#### **What advice should students and practitioners consider when selecting the option of government/federal pharmacy?**

One pharmacist stressed the importance of thinking through the decision carefully with the following advice: “Regarding military service it is said that the individual makes the decision to join, but the family makes the decision to stay. Military service is a noble calling but it is not for everyone. If you have interest in joining the military, you will be referred to speak with a health professions recruiter, but more importantly, make contact with a military pharmacist for more information and details.” Another echoed the effect this decision can have on the whole family: “Be ready to be challenged and have family on board since the entire family serves together.”

Another pharmacist advised: “Be willing to try new roles and reach beyond your comfort level. There are no limits to what you can do as a pharmacist in federal healthcare. Be willing to develop new skills outside of traditional pharmacy roles.”

The importance of communication skills were mentioned by several commenters including this one: “Public Health Service pharmacists in Indian Health Service must be very career oriented to succeed. They should be interested in participating in the PHS organization and in moving the profession forward. To be successful in IHS, I believe a pharmacist must be very good at communicating with other healthcare professionals and with patients. We are called upon to be innovative and dedicated to work in remote areas serving an underserved population. This is a challenging and rewarding career path, but it shouldn't be entered into without forethought.”

There are several opportunities for students and new practitioners to explore different types

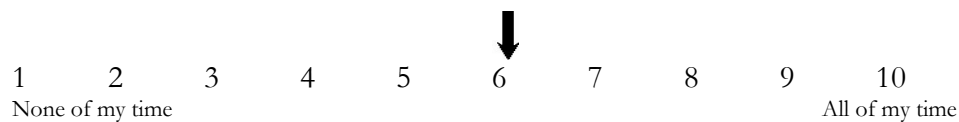
of practice environments in the government arena. The PHS offers internships that usually range from 30 days to 6 months. They also offer the Commissioned Officer Student Training and Extern Program (COSTEP). Through COSTEP, students have the opportunity to become commissioned officers for up to 120 days, thus enabling them to experience the opportunities offered by a PHS career.

### Critical Factor Ratings

#### **Interaction With Patients**

A 6.1 mid-range ranking indicates that respondents spend some of their time interacting with patients or other members of the public. However, there is sizable variation in the different responsibilities pharmacists in different government/federal pharmacy positions.

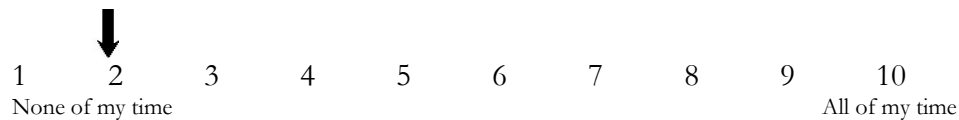
= 6.1



#### **Conducting Physical Assessments**

With a low range ranking at 1.9, respondents report spending little time conducting physical assessments.

= 1.9



#### **Interpreting Laboratory Values**

Respondents spend slightly more time interpreting laboratory values compared with physical assessments of patients.

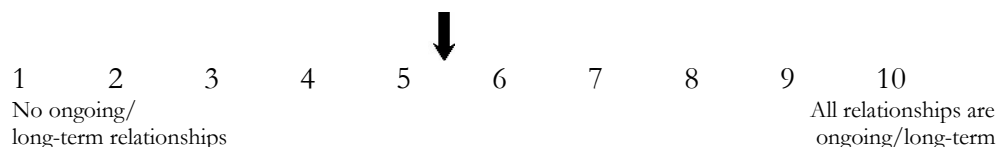
= 3.1



#### **Continuity of Relationships**

A mid-range rating of 5.4 indicates that these pharmacists experience an average level of opportunity to develop long-term relationships with patients and consumers. This is variable at different settings and was reflected in the comments. Some pharmacists cited this as one of the most appealing aspects of their job and others cited that because their pharmacy was so busy that it was sometimes difficult. Time with patients will depend on the practice location and size of the patient population

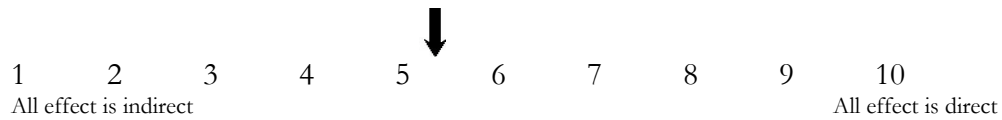
= 5.4



### Helping People

Government/federal pharmacists responding to this survey are fairly evenly divided between direct and indirect assistance to people, reflecting the range between those who are directly involved with patients and those who are principally involved in management responsibilities that can have indirect impact.

= 5.3



### Collaboration With Other Professionals

A higher rating of 7.2 shows a greater involvement of government/federal pharmacists in collaborating with other (non-pharmacist) professionals. This may reflect the close interactions pharmacists have in municipal health clinics, various branches of the military, and within the VA. Collaborative practice is well established within the IHS as well.

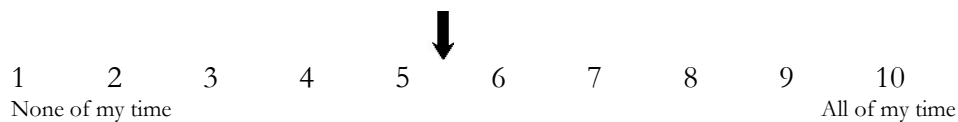
= 7.2



### Educating Other Professionals

A rating of 5.4 indicates the mid-range time commitment by these pharmacists in educating other professionals. Pharmacists practicing in the government or federal arena are asked to share their knowledge with other health providers through in-service programs and other forums.

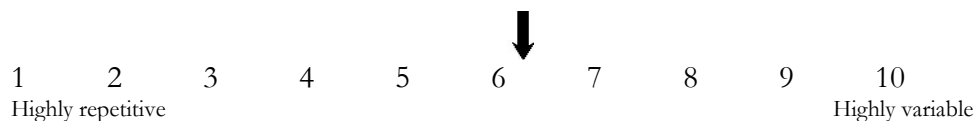
= 5.4



### Variety of Daily Activities

The 6.2 ranking indicates a tendency toward variety in daily duties, which some respondents considered to be an appealing aspect of their practice. Some pharmacists may focus on more traditional dispensing roles in their positions, while others may be required to manage staff, participate in meetings, attend professional gatherings, or perform research, as part of their responsibilities.

= 6.2



### Multiple Task Handling

The 7.7 rating shows that government/federal pharmacists juggle multiple tasks in their practice. Balancing patient needs, administrative matters, and management oversight may be a routine part of their job. Considering the fast pace in which public health issues can

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change, one can see how these pharmacists need to be able to multitask.

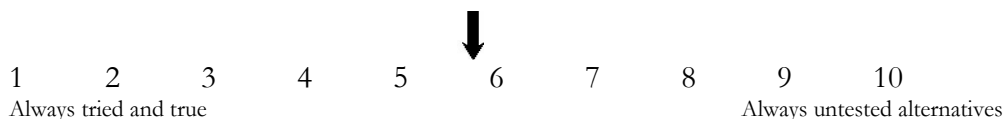
= 7.7



### Problem Solving

Pharmacists in the government/federal arena sometimes use known solutions and at other times must design innovative solutions to new problems. The way problems are solved depends on the type of position these pharmacists hold.

= 5.8



### Focus of Expertise

Respondents indicated that they are midway between being generalists versus needing or using more specialized expertise.

= 5.1



### Innovative Thinking

Government/federal pharmacists show a need to “think outside the box” in their positions, with a 6.7 rating. Such innovation could range from a clinician’s development of a new patient record system to a proposal for changing policy and procedures within a military pharmacy operation to pharmacists’ activities as first responders, depending on the specific position involved.

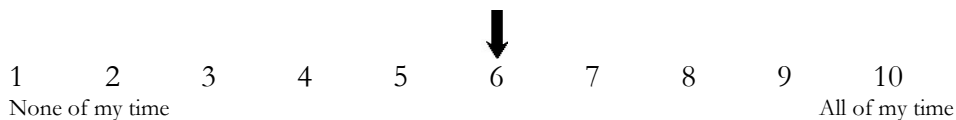
= 6.7



### Applying Scientific Knowledge

Applying scientific knowledge received a 6.0 rating, indicating government/federal pharmacists’ frequent reliance on their scientific foundation as pharmacists or their advanced scientific training beyond pharmacy in carrying out activities. Pharmacists who serve within the FDA often need to apply their scientific knowledge in reviewing new drug applications.

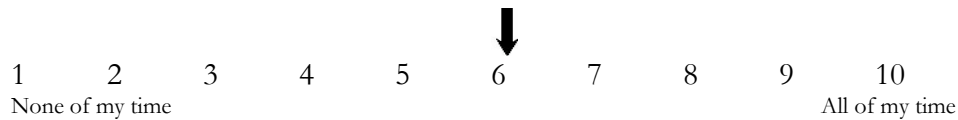
= 6.0



### Applying Medical Knowledge

Applying medical knowledge received a 6.1 rating, slightly higher than that for application of scientific knowledge.

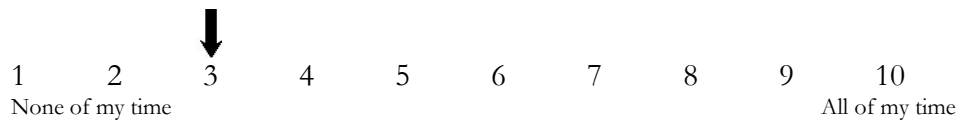
= 6.1



### Creating New Knowledge by Conducting Research

With a 3.0 rating, government/federal pharmacists do not often conduct research in their positions; exceptions might include clinical studies within direct patient care settings.

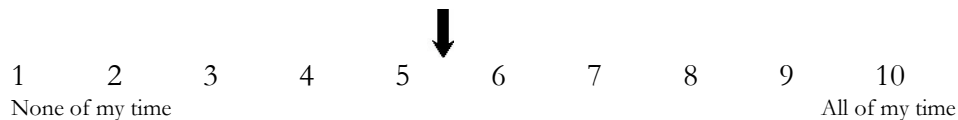
= 3.0



### Management/Supervision of Others

A solid majority (61%) of pharmacists indicate they are in management positions and spend more than half their time addressing management or supervisory responsibilities. This varies significantly across different positions. Some pharmacists may spend virtually their entire work time in such activities, while others spend considerably less.

= 5.4



### Management/Supervision of a Business

Government/federal pharmacists are mid-range in the amount of time spent on the management and supervision of business operations.

= 5.0



### Pressure/Stress

Pharmacists in government/federal pharmacy feel stress and pressure in their daily work activities, perhaps reflecting the need to balance many tasks.

= 6.8



### Work Schedule

Pharmacists in this setting have a very predictable work schedule. These practitioners know their workday schedules in advance and are able to plan their leisure or off-time activities.

= 6.9



### Part-Time Opportunities

Not surprisingly, these pharmacists are not employed in organizations that offer many part-time opportunities for pharmacists, unlike some other pharmacy settings. These opportunities vary among the various positions, however, with more part-time positions offered within more traditional dispensing roles.

= 1.9



### Job-Sharing Opportunities

Job-sharing is limited for reasons similar to above.

= 2.0



### Exit/Re-entry Opportunities

Opportunities for exit/re-entry received a lower-range rating.

= 3.6



### Parental Leave Opportunities

Government/federal pharmacists are in positions that provide adequate opportunities for parental leave when needed.

= 7.0



### Leisure/Family Time

Reflecting their predictable work schedule, pharmacists in government/federal pharmacy are able to plan and enjoy their free time for personal or family activities, reflected by the higher 6.8 rating. Typically, all government employees not in a direct patient care setting would have weekends and holidays for their personal enjoyment.

= 6.8



**Job Security**

Respondents rated their job security at 8.1. Government/federal pharmacy employees feel a very high degree of job security with little variation; this factor was the second highest for the group on the survey. Some of this sense of security may be explained by the thorough screening and civil service administrative procedures employed prior to the person being hired into government service. Additional protections are provided through public employees regulations and civil service procedures, which are legislatively ratified protections not commonly available in the private sector.

= 8.1



**Opportunities for Advancement**

Government/federal pharmacists report that there is ample opportunity for advancement in their workplace. An Oklahoma respondent stated there is room for “growth, advancement, professional development.”

= 6.9



**Opportunities for Leadership Development**

With a 7.2 rating, government/federal pharmacists generally experience a good level of opportunity for leadership development. This might be available through assistance or encouragement obtaining an advanced degree as well as learning new management or leadership skills. Leadership training and development is a key aspect of the military.

= 7.2



**Community Prestige**

Government/federal pharmacists report a high level of prestige within the community, perceiving that their dual roles as a pharmacist and as a government employee create an aura of respect for them and their position. Many pharmacists serving in the military receive public respect.



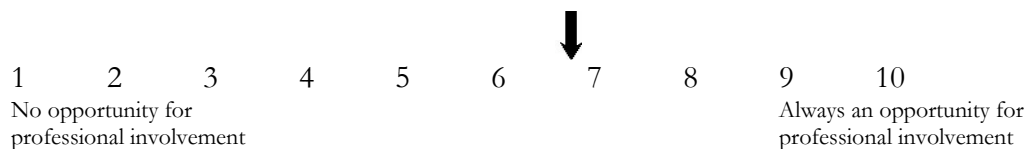
= 7.2



### Professional Involvement

With a 6.8 rating, government/federal pharmacists enjoy a high level of opportunity to be involved in the pharmacy profession. That involvement includes belonging and participating in professional organizations and meetings as well as attending continuing education programs. Many organizations in the pharmaceutical industry call upon the unique perspectives of government/federal pharmacists to help guide their program development.

= 6.8



### Income

Government/federal pharmacists report generally feeling properly compensated for their work time and efforts. Although some comment that the initial salary is somewhat lower than other pharmacy positions, they indicated that over time the salary and benefits equal out.

= 6.9



### Benefits (vacation, health, retirement)

Given the ranking at 9.0, government/federal pharmacists enjoy an excellent level of benefits. Unlike the private sector, where retirement packages and health care coverage are not consistently available, government employees are nearly universally covered by such plans. Similarly, vacations are a routine benefit.

= 9.0



### Geographic Location

Government/federal pharmacists report a high level of opportunity to practice in multiple locations around the country (and even overseas), rather than being limited to a single geographic location, thereby placing it among the most geographically flexible career options.

= 7.4



### Working Remotely

With a fairly low score of 3.7, not much of most federal pharmacists' work can be done remotely.

= 3.7



### Autonomy

Government/federal pharmacists report a fairly level of autonomy in their work. As pharmacists, they are entrusted to work independently within their practice settings. Being employed by large organizations, there are typically very detailed procedures and policies in which they may function with little managerial oversight.

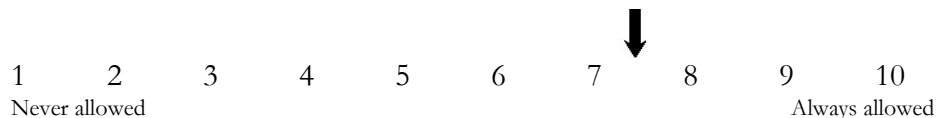
= 7.0



### Self-Worth

With an 7.4 rating, respondents indicate they are able to enhance personal value and generate positive outcomes in their practices.

= 7.4



### Future Focus

Government/federal pharmacists are in practice settings that generally allow or encourage a focus on the future, rather than being exclusively attuned to the present work situation. Many pharmacists in the military must prepare for the unexpected and create plans to deal with an uncertain future. Federal pharmacists are often cited as being on the leading edge in terms of innovative pharmacy practice.

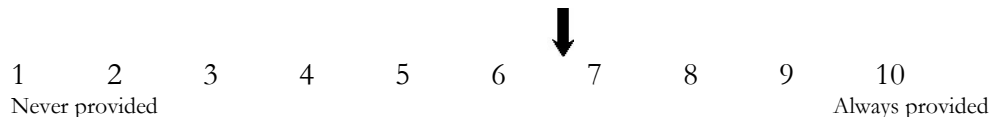
= 6.9



### Professional Prestige

Opportunities to participate and be recognized by other pharmacists in professional organizations are generally experienced by pharmacists in government. Such participation is a requisite to prestige within the profession.

= 6.7



### Unique Practice Environment

Respondents indicate the unique quality of government/federal pharmacy practice settings. For example, an IHS clinic is unavailable in the private sector; while a military pharmacy provides a unique patient base.

= 7.7



### Advanced Degree

Respondents differed on their responses providing a 5.0 rating, which indicates an advanced degree may or may not be needed within government/federal pharmacy. This need varies widely depending upon the position. A research scientist at the CDC or FDA, for example, would likely need a PhD degree to advance within the organization.

= 5.0



### Entrepreneurial Opportunity

Not surprisingly, entrepreneurial opportunity is not widely available for most government/federal pharmacy employees.

= 2.7



### Additional Training

Additional training and continuing education is nearly universally required in government/federal pharmacy practice settings. Those involved in direct patient care activities need to stay abreast of new products and scientific advances; additional training is also important for those involved in reviewing new drug applications or creating new systems within larger pharmacy departments and organizations.

= 6.8



### Interacting With Colleagues

Respondents indicated that they interact with colleagues on a regular basis. Considering the team approach used in much of the military and other federal agencies, this makes a great deal of sense.

= 7.4



### Travel

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

= 3.1



### Writing

Respondents were mid-range in the amount of writing that they do. Perhaps the writing of reports, a necessity for the government, enters into the picture for many of these pharmacists.

= 4.8



### Working With Teams

As mentioned earlier, many positions are team based. However, practitioners seeing patients may work independently in some instances when interacting with their patients.

= 6.6



### Mean Scores for Critical Factors

1. Interaction with people	6.1
2. Performing physical assessments	1.9
3. Interpreting laboratory values	3.1
4. Continuity of relationships	5.4
5. Extent to which effect is direct	5.3
6. Collaboration with other professionals	7.2
7. Educating other professionals	5.4
8. Variety of daily activities	6.2
9. Multiple task handling	7.7
10. Problem solving	5.8
11. Focus of expertise	5.1
12. Innovative thinking	6.7
13. Applying scientific knowledge	6.0
14. Applying medical knowledge	6.1
15. Creating new knowledge by conducting research	3.0
16. Managing others	5.4
17. Managing business operations	5.0
18. Pressure/Stress	6.8
19. Work schedule	6.9
20. Part time opportunities	1.9
21. Job sharing	2.0

22. Exit and re-entry	<b>3.6</b>
23. Parental leave	<b>7.0</b>
24. Free time for leisure/family activities	<b>6.8</b>
25. Job security	<b>8.1</b>
26. Opportunities for advancement	<b>6.9</b>
27. Opportunities for leadership development	<b>7.2</b>
28. Community prestige	<b>7.2</b>
29. Professional involvement	<b>6.8</b>
30. Income	<b>6.9</b>
31. Benefits (vacation, health, retirement)	<b>9.0</b>
32. Geographic location	<b>7.4</b>
33. Working Remotely	<b>3.7</b>
34. Autonomy	<b>7.0</b>
35. Self-Worth	<b>7.4</b>
36. Future focus	<b>6.9</b>
37. Professional prestige	<b>6.7</b>
38. Unique practice environment	<b>7.7</b>
39. Advanced degree	<b>5.0</b>
40. Entrepreneurial opportunity	<b>2.7</b>
41. Additional training	<b>6.8</b>
42. Interacting with co-workers	<b>7.4</b>
43. Travel	<b>3.1</b>
44. Writing	<b>4.8</b>
45. Working with teams	<b>6.6</b>

### Reference

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

### Professional Organizations

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

Department of Health and Human Services (HHS)  
[www.hhs.gov/pharmacy](http://www.hhs.gov/pharmacy)