

Health-System Pharmacy: Outpatient

Background

Outpatient pharmacy can be described as a diverse clinical practice environment. Most pharmacists in the outpatient setting provide multiple roles ranging from dispensing and counseling to medication therapy management (MTM) services and transition of care. The environment provides patients with the opportunity to speak one-on-one with a pharmacist and schedule MTM services and/or disease management services.

Outpatient pharmacy can be primary care-based or disease-specific services. For example, outpatient clinics can focus on HIV/AIDS, immunizations, lipids, diabetes, and other areas. The unique aspect of the environment is access to the patient's medical record and the multidisciplinary approach where pharmacists work in teams with other health care providers.

Characteristics

Forty-seven outpatient pharmacists responded to the 2012 *APhA Career Pathway Evaluation Program* survey. Sixty percent of respondents held an entry-level pharmacy degree; 40% held the PharmD degree. Fifteen percent indicated that they also had a non-pharmacy bachelor's degree and 21% indicated an advanced degree (MA, MS, MBS, PhD, or other). Twenty-three percent had been through a residency program, 39% had been through a certificate-training program, and 14% reported having been through some form of other training.

Respondents' average age was 46 years old. Sixty percent of respondents were female. Income data show 10% earn between \$80,000–\$100,000, while 77% earn \$100,000 or more per year, with 13% earning greater than \$150,000. The average time worked per week was 44 hours.

An overwhelming majority of respondents indicated that they were satisfied with their job, with 49% indicating “extremely satisfied” and 42% indicating “somewhat satisfied.” Similarly, most respondents indicated that they felt the job was challenging, with 36% indicating “extremely challenging” and 53% indicating “somewhat challenging.”

Respondents indicated that they spend 38% of their time in the role of dispensing medication along with the associated patient counseling. Interacting with co-workers was one of the highest-rated critical factors for this group.

Insider's Perspective

What aspects of the job are most appealing?

Two of the most appealing aspects of these roles include collaboration with other health care providers and patient care/direct patient contact, cited by 19% of outpatient pharmacists.

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One respondent indicated “collaboration with health care providers in diabetes, hypertension, asthma, and immunization care” as an appealing aspect of the role. Another respondent stated, “What I like most is the one-on-one patient care, but also like the teamwork experience.”

Discharge counseling was cited by 16% of the respondents as one of the most appealing aspects of what they do. Pharmacists often work in settings with challenges that vary from day to day, thereby presenting opportunities to learn and grow professionally.

One respondent summed up what many stated: the appeal of the position comes from “direct patient care—drug information—patient counseling.”

What aspects of the job are least appealing?

Administration (bureaucracy) and workload (short staffing numbers) were each cited by 16% of pharmacists as the least appealing aspects of their roles. These pharmacists are very satisfied with the work they perform, but do not enjoy how some policies and protocols are implemented.

One respondent who was concerned with staffing levels stated, “I feel rushed rather than feeling as though I have as much time as patients need.” Another respondent was to the point when stating that the least appealing aspects were “long hours, short staffing.”

Respondents indicated that they spend approximately 29% of their time on administrative roles.

What advice should students and practitioners consider when selecting the option of health-system outpatient pharmacy?

Twenty-five percent of the outpatient pharmacists cited the importance of being open to alternatives because there are multiple opportunities in some of the environments. Continuing education and training are important to succeed in this environment. Sixteen percent indicated that good communication skills—written and oral—are essential for the role.

One respondent indicated, “Those who seek to work in [outpatient pharmacy] must be able to communicate effectively with patients and allied health care providers alike.” Another stated that students should “be open-minded to the types of environments that they work in.”

Critical Factor Ratings

Interaction With Patients

Outpatient pharmacists indicated that they interact with patients some of the time. One respondent indicated that this was important within the “collaborative patient care” environment.

= 6.8



Conducting Physical Assessments

Respondents indicated that they spend little time conducting patient physical assessments. This was one of the lowest-rated critical factors for this group.

= 2.7



Interpreting Laboratory Values

Outpatient pharmacists have access to medical records. While they spend little time interpreting lab values, the information is accessible to many if needed. One respondent indicated having “access to patient medical records. This allows me to answer many patient questions—[review] results of lab tests.”

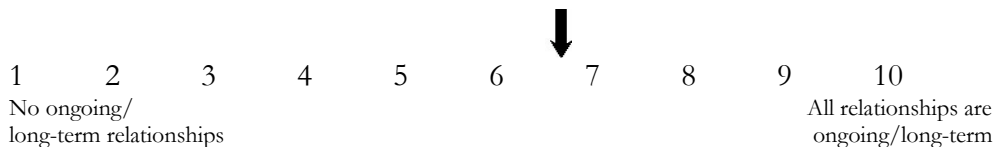
= 3.8



Continuity of Relationships

Respondents were high mid-range regarding continuity of relationships. Considering the environment, the relationships of outpatient pharmacists go beyond patients to others.

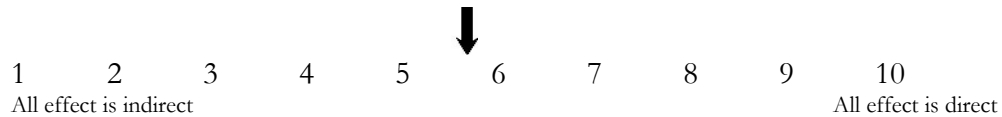
= 6.7



Helping People

Outpatient pharmacists were mid-range in their response to directly working with patients. This may be based on the diverse activities that they perform working with patients and having administrative functions to complete as well. One respondent stated having “the ability to affect direct patient services and programming across a very broad scope.”

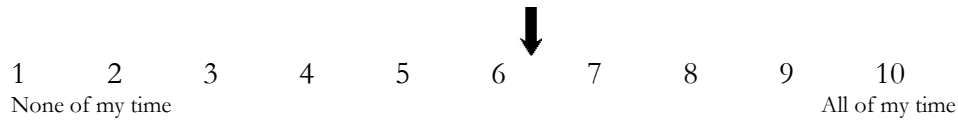
= 5.8



Collaboration With Other Professionals

These pharmacists work with other health care professionals some of the time. One respondent provided insights to the collaboration by stating, “The ability to collaborate with other health care team members [is important], as it provides a supportive work environment.” Another reported liking the opportunity to be “working with a multidisciplinary team.”

= 6.2



Educating Other Professionals

Outpatient pharmacists rated this factor in the low range. While they work with other professionals, they spend little time in an education mode.

= 3.8



Variety of Daily Activities

Respondents were exactly at the mid-range 5.5 indicating that they have some repetitive roles and some that are variable. Even so, one respondent indicated working with a “wide variety of medications, conditions, and situations daily.”

= 5.5



Multiple Task Handling

Multiple task handling was one of four critical factors that were rated the highest by outpatient pharmacists. In describing this factor, one respondent stated, “I have a mix of administrative work and patient contact.”

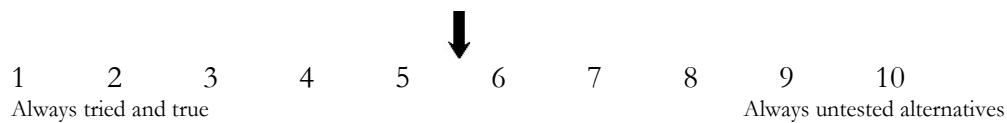
= 7.4



Problem Solving

These practitioners are mid-range in using tried and true solutions and looking at alternatives. One respondent found this aspect appealing and enjoyed “creating a vision and solving problems to achieve the vision.”

= 5.6



Focus of Expertise

Outpatient pharmacists work in a variety of settings, which impacts the focus of expertise. While some work in more general primary care areas, some are specialized.

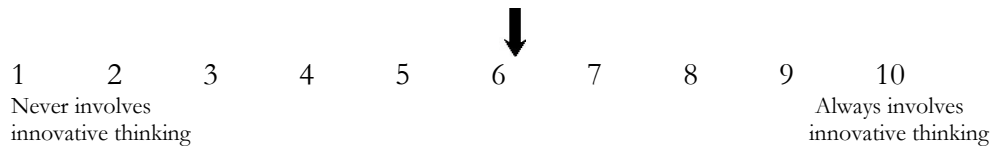
= 5.0



Innovative Thinking

Respondents were upper mid-range regarding involvement of innovative thinking. One respondent liked to be innovative with the “opportunity to expand new programs.”

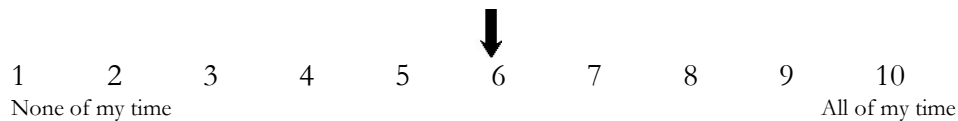
= 6.1



Applying Scientific Knowledge

Outpatient pharmacists apply scientific knowledge to some aspects of their work as they indicated this factor in the mid-range with a score of 5.9.

= 5.9



Applying Medical Knowledge

Respondents indicated applying slightly more medical knowledge than scientific knowledge.

= 6.6



Creating New Knowledge by Conducting Research

Respondents rated this as one of the lowest critical factors for the group. Most spend their time in more direct patient care roles versus research.

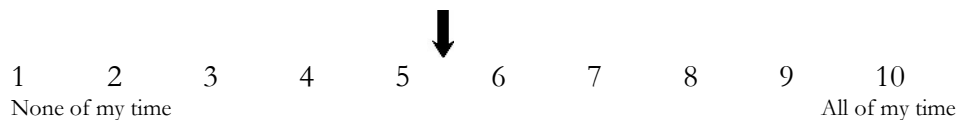
= 2.9



Management/Supervision of Others

Most outpatient pharmacists oversee some staff, however only 7% of their time is spent on personnel management.

= 5.4



Management/Supervision of a Business

Respondents indicated a lower mid-range of 4.4 for the amount of time spent on business management issues.

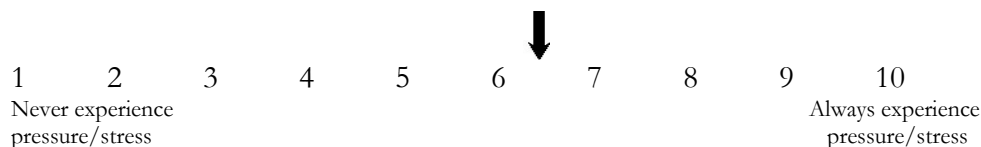
= 4.4



Pressure/Stress

As many feel that pressure/stress can come from a variety of internal and external influences, outpatient pharmacists indicated that they are slightly higher in this critical factor. One respondent indicated the stress of “being called in many different directions,” while another respondent expressed concern with the “lack of pharmacist overlap.”

= 6.3



Work Schedule

Outpatient pharmacists tended to have a more predictable schedule. While one respondent stated “good hours” another stated “long hours because of short staffing.”

= 7.0



Part-Time Opportunities

While part-time opportunities exist in many areas of pharmacy, outpatient pharmacy has limited part-time opportunities as seen by the 4.8 rating.

= 4.8



Job-Sharing Opportunities

There are very limited job-sharing opportunities in outpatient pharmacy settings.

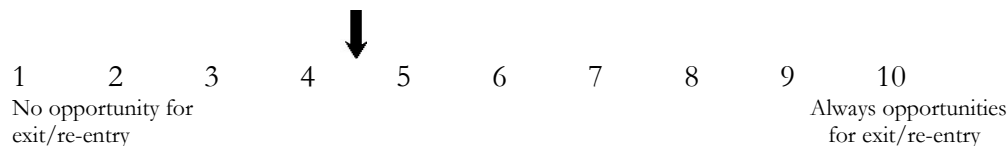
= 3.0



Exit/Re-entry Opportunities

Opportunities to exit and then re-enter outpatient pharmacy exist but they are limited.

= 4.5



Parental Leave Opportunities

Parental leave was one of the five top-rated critical factors for outpatient pharmacists. They enjoy the benefit provided to them.

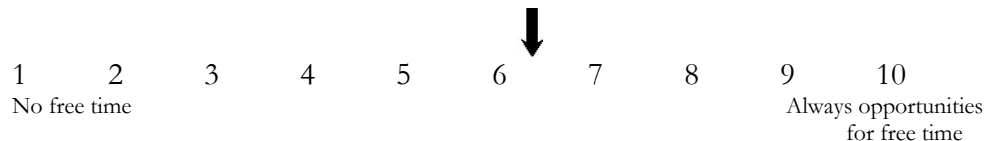
= 7.1



Leisure/Family Time

Outpatient pharmacists reported having an appropriate amount of leisure/family time. Some respondents commented that they only work daytime hours while another listed working 3:30 PM to midnight; interestingly, both indicated these were the hours that they preferred based on family and other commitments.

= 6.3



Job Security

At 7.4, job security was among the highest rated along with three other factors for this group. Pharmacists indicated that they felt this is an area that will see expansion in the future.

= 7.4



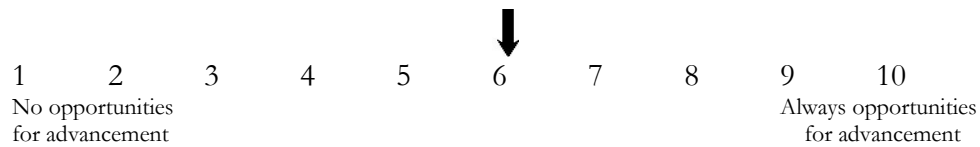
Opportunities for Advancement

Outpatient pharmacists were mid-range with a 6.1 rating of this factor. One respondent felt that “the multitude of job opportunities under one roof” provide for advancement opportunities.

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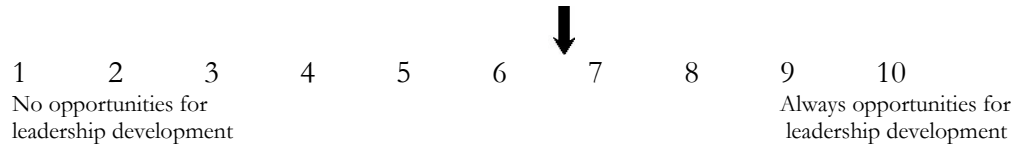
= 6.1



Opportunities for Leadership Development

Along with numerous opportunities for advancement, outpatient pharmacists indicated that there are some opportunities for leadership development as well.

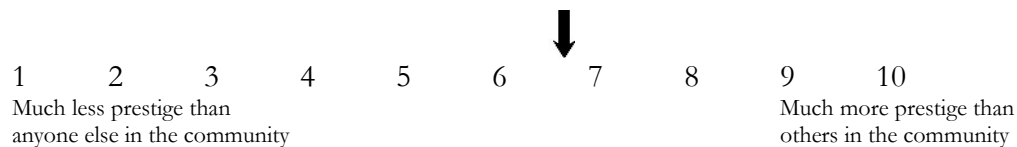
= 6.7



Community Prestige

Outpatient pharmacists indicated that they were mid-range with the prestige they have compared with others in the community.

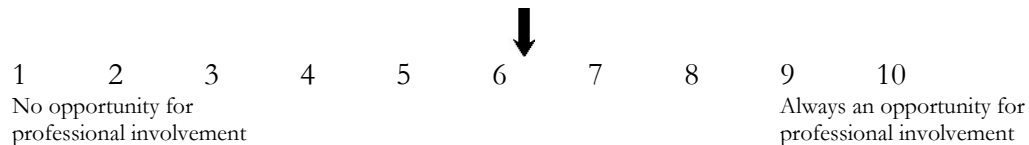
= 6.7



Professional Involvement

Respondents indicated that there are opportunities for professional involvement based on practitioners' own desires.

= 6.2



Income

Income is one of the five highest-rated critical factors for this group. Most outpatient pharmacists felt they were properly compensated.

= 7.1



Benefits (vacation, health, retirement)

Tied closely to the other three highest-rated critical factors, outpatient pharmacists indicated that the benefits deserve a high rating.

= 7.4



Geographic Location

Surprisingly, outpatient pharmacists indicated that there are limited geographic locations to practice in this field and thus gave the critical factor a 4.4 low mid-range score.

= 4.4



Working Remotely

Working remotely tied with another factor for the lowest rating by outpatient pharmacists. Based on the role that they provide, this rating makes a great deal of sense.

= 2.3



Autonomy

Outpatient pharmacists rated themselves as mid-range regarding autonomy. Autonomy is based on the specific functions they are performing.

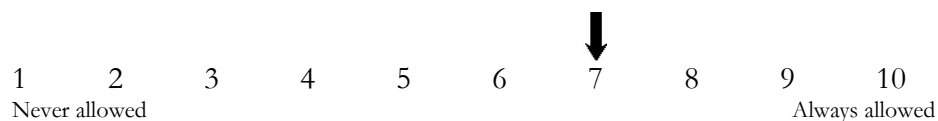
= 6.8



Self-Worth

Respondents felt that the roles they perform provide for a feeling of self-worth, which comes from working with patients or opportunities to work on projects. One respondent indicated enjoyment from the “opportunity to present new ideas and develop those ideas into new services.”

= 7.0



Future Focus

While outpatient pharmacists indicated they were mid-range at 6.8 for focusing on immediate versus future activities, one respondent indicated the appeal of “looking toward the future to coordinate overall outpatient services from transitioning the inpatient to the outpatient setting with clinical support and providing the prescriptions prior to discharge with extensive counseling.”

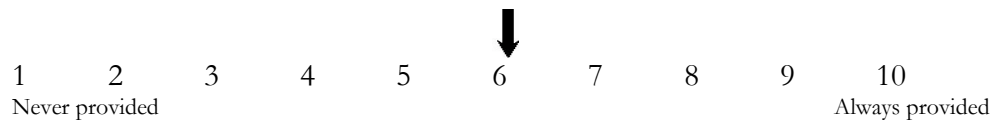
= 6.8



Professional Prestige

Outpatient pharmacists rated professional prestige slightly lower than community prestige. They indicated that there are opportunities for professional prestige.

= 6.1



Unique Practice Environment

Some respondents mentioned that outpatient pharmacy services have changed recently and the environment is also changing toward a more unique practice experience.

= 7.1



Advanced Degree

While an advanced degree is not required, 21% indicated that they already held an advanced degree (MA, MS, MBS, PhD, or other).

= 3.9



Entrepreneurial Opportunity

Outpatient pharmacists were in the lower mid-range regarding entrepreneurial opportunities. The theme was more linked to trying to establish the need for outpatient services versus focusing on entrepreneurial clinical services.

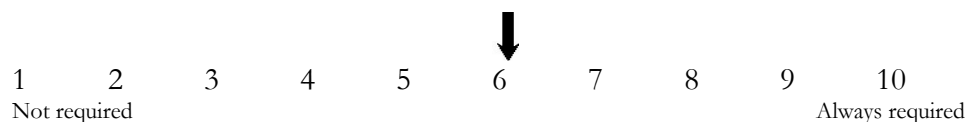
= 4.1



Additional Training

Respondents were mid-range at 6.1 regarding additional training requirements. As stated earlier, 23% had been through a residency program, 39% had been through a certificate-training program, and 14% reported having been through some form of other training.

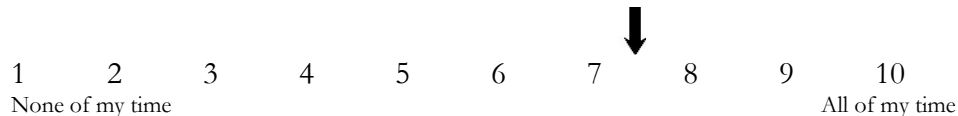
= 6.1



Interacting With Colleagues

Rated as the highest critical factor for the group along with multiple task handling, job security, and benefits, interacting with colleagues is an important and appealing aspect of the work provided by outpatient pharmacists.

= 7.4



Travel

Tied for the lowest-rated critical factor, outpatient pharmacists do little to no travel for their roles.

= 2.3



Writing

Outpatient pharmacists spend little time writing for the profession. Most writing is done as documentation of services provided.

= 3.2



Working With Teams

Respondents indicated that they spend parts of their days working in teams. One respondent summed up what many were describing as working in a “clinic-based setting with integrated interaction with other health care workers (i.e., nurses, physicians).”

= 6.8



Mean Scores for Critical Factors

1. Interaction With Patients	6.8
2. Conducting Physical Assessments	2.7
3. Interpreting Laboratory Values	3.8
4. Continuity of Relationships	6.7
5. Helping People	5.8
6. Collaboration With Other Professionals	6.2
7. Educating Other Professionals	3.8
8. Variety of Daily Activities	5.5
9. Multiple Task Handling	7.4
10. Problem Solving	5.6
11. Focus of Expertise	5.0
12. Innovative Thinking	6.1
13. Applying Scientific Knowledge	5.9
14. Applying Medical Knowledge	6.6
15. Creating New Knowledge by Conducting Research	2.9
16. Management/Supervision of Others	5.4
17. Management/Supervision of a Business	4.4
18. Pressure/Stress	6.3
19. Work Schedule	7.0
20. Part-Time Opportunities	4.8
21. Job-Sharing Opportunities	3.0
22. Exit and Re-entry Opportunities	4.5
23. Parental Leave Opportunities	7.1
24. Leisure/Family Time	6.3
25. Job Security	7.4
26. Opportunities for Advancement	6.1
27. Opportunities for Leadership Development	6.7
28. Community Prestige	6.7
29. Professional Involvement	6.2
30. Income	7.1
31. Benefits (vacation, health, retirement)	7.4
32. Geographic Location	4.4
33. Working Remotely	2.3
34. Autonomy	6.8
35. Self-Worth	7.0
36. Future Focus	6.8
37. Professional Prestige	6.1
38. Unique Practice Environment	7.1
39. Advanced Degree	3.9
40. Entrepreneurial Opportunity	4.1
41. Additional Training	6.1
42. Interacting With Colleagues	7.4
43. Travel	2.3
44. Writing	3.2
45. Working With Teams	6.8

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Professional Organizations

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Board of Pharmacy Specialties (BPS)

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