

Long-Term Care

Background

As a general rule, a long-term care pharmacist is engaged by a long-term care pharmacy to provide pharmacy, infusion, education, consulting, and related services for a specific patient population. There are two general career paths in long-term care pharmacy: one focuses on dispensing/management operations and the other on consultant services. This profile addresses both roles.

With the “aging of America,” the proportion of people needing long-term care can be expected to increase. Long-term care pharmacists practice in a variety of settings, including hospitals that own skilled nursing facilities, long-term care pharmacies, nursing homes, and rehabilitation facilities, or they may practice as independent consultants. Pharmacists in this field work with medication dosage requirements, drug interactions, drug therapy regimens, and formulary decisions that differ from those used in other population segments. They can be restricted to a limited number of medications to treat patients because of the greater interactive effects of drugs in elderly patients. Although generally a geriatric population, some long-term care facility populations include the placement of non-geriatric residents such as those with HIV infection, multiple sclerosis, amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, or developmentally challenged residents. A respondent from Washington stated that the “use of clinical skills in monitoring and providing therapy to patients [is exciting].” Another respondent from Wisconsin stated having the “opportunity to use clinical skills and see something new every day.”

Twenty-six percent of work time is spent on patient care services. This is followed by 16% spent on business/organization development, 13% on medication dispensing (including associated patient counseling), 12% on consulting, and 7% on case management. The remaining time is divided among a number of different functions.

Characteristics

Thirty-three long-term care pharmacists responded to the 2007 *APhA Career Pathway Evaluation Program* survey. Sixty-four percent of respondents held an entry-level pharmacy degree, with 24% having a PharmD degree. Twelve percent indicated they earned an advanced degree (MA, MS, MBA, PhD, or other). Notably, 42% had completed some certificate training, 24% had been through a residency program, and 12% completed some form of other training.

Respondents' average age was 47 years old. Just over two thirds (68%) of respondents were female. Fifty-five percent indicated some type of management role. Income data show 40% earn between \$80,000–100,000, 52% earn \$100,000 or more per year, and 8% indicated that they earn more than \$170,000. The average time worked per week was 47 hours. Respondents represented 22 states.

The majority of respondents indicated that they were satisfied with their work with 61% indicating “extremely satisfied” and 33% indicating “somewhat satisfied.” On a similar scale,

respondents said they felt the work was challenging, with 52% indicating “extremely challenging” and 42% indicating “somewhat challenging.”

One respondent from Pennsylvania stated finding satisfaction being “a member of a quality improvement group, part of the interdisciplinary care team, [and serving on the] safety committee.” A West Virginia respondent expressed that one needs to have the “knowledge and desire for geriatric practice.”

Insider’s Perspective

What aspects of the job are most appealing?

Twenty-four percent of the respondents indicated flexibility of the position as the most appealing aspect of their work. A Tennessee respondent indicated enjoyment in the “flexible day-to-day schedule.”

Two additional areas received 15% each as most appealing aspects: use of clinical skills and working in interdisciplinary teams. A New York respondent indicated that the work is “clinically rewarding.” In addition, an Ohio colleague stated enjoyment in being “part of [an] interdisciplinary team.” On a final note, one respondent from Nevada summed up the numerous items that many long-term care pharmacists mentioned as being appealing: “flexible schedules, travel opportunities, association participation, working with consultants and nurses across the country, variety of tasks, and responsibilities.”

What aspects of the job are least appealing?

In contrast to the most appealing aspects, 18% stated that “workload/long hours” is the least appealing aspect of the work. Another 13% indicated that “paperwork” was one of the least appealing aspects.

A respondent from Illinois stated the least appealing aspect is the “long weekend and evening hours.” A North Carolina pharmacist added “the sometimes overwhelming paperwork” is the least appealing aspect.

What advice should students and practitioners consider when selecting the option of long-term care pharmacy?

No one theme emerged from respondents. A Colorado respondent stated the need to “be prepared to deal closely with the prescribers.” Another respondent from West Virginia indicated that those looking to long-term care should be aware of the “travel and working alone.” An Ohio respondent summed the thoughts of many by stating that one “must have good people and communication skills and the ability to work with little direction.” Lastly, a Missouri respondent stated that “long-term care is a unique practice helping the most vulnerable population—elderly and disabled.”

Critical Factor Ratings

Interaction With Patients

Respondents rated this factor in the low mid-range at 4.3. Many respondents commented that their interactions are greater with other health care professionals versus patients.

$$= 4.3$$
$$\sigma = 2.5$$



Conducting Physical Assessments

Long-term care pharmacy is often seen as an excellent opportunity to conduct basic preliminary health assessments of patients. Evaluation of symptoms and other indicators can be helpful in directing the patient's therapy. However, respondents indicated that little of their time is spent conducting physical assessments with a rating of only 1.8, the lowest rating for this group.

$$= 1.8$$
$$\sigma = 1.3$$



Interpreting Laboratory Values

In comparison to the above factor, long-term care pharmacists have access to laboratory tests and interpret these values in directing the patient's therapy.

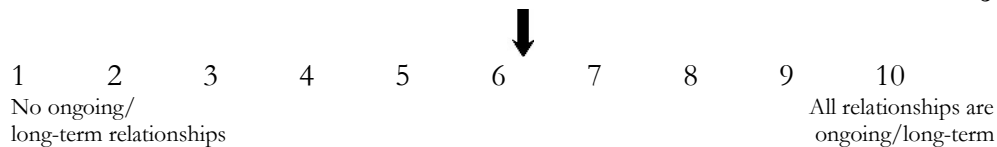
$$= 4.1$$
$$\sigma = 2.6$$



Continuity of Relationships

Long-term care pharmacists have the opportunity to get to know their patients and community health professionals. They develop a working knowledge of the idiosyncrasies of their patients and their therapies; many pharmacists would agree that this is key to their effectiveness. Those pharmacists with consulting roles in long-term care pharmacy have the opportunity to develop continuous relationships with patients while those pharmacists with a dispensing focus may not have as great an opportunity to develop these relationships.

$$= 6.2$$
$$\sigma = 3.1$$



Helping People

There are many pharmacists who cite helping people as the primary factor for choosing pharmacy as a career. Helping people ranked relatively low with a 4.9 rating, showing that the long-term care pharmacists who responded feel they have a more indirect effect on the well being of the individuals they treat.

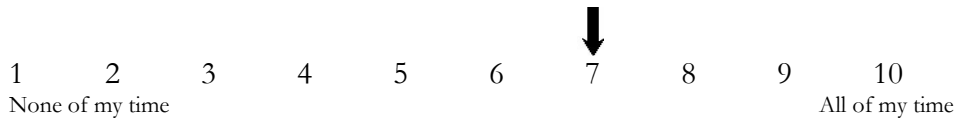
= 4.9
 $\sigma = 2.4$



Collaboration With Other Professionals

Collaboration with other professionals scored in the upper mid-range with a 7.0 rating. While communication with doctors and nurses in a long-term care pharmacy is often limited to authorizations or new prescription orders via the telephone and fax, this collaboration is face-to-face when on-site. Often, both the pharmacy and the physician's office are engaged in longer discussions with each other, thereby allowing the physician, nurse, and pharmacist to communicate accurately and concisely to ensure the patient gets optimal therapy.

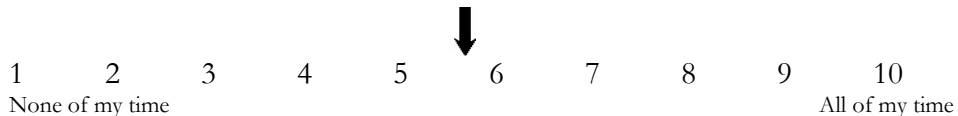
= 7.0
 $\sigma = 2.1$



Educating Other Professionals

Typically, long-term care pharmacists engage in educating other professionals when they provide in-service education. Some long-term care pharmacies choose to educate physicians and nurses in their daily work.

= 5.7
 $\sigma = 2.1$



Variety of Daily Activities

Respondents were involved in a number of different roles. By definition, this involves variety and includes prescription evaluation and therapy review. The challenges often arise in resolving therapy and other prescription-related problems, especially for elderly patients. More often than not, the pharmacists felt their tasks were varied.

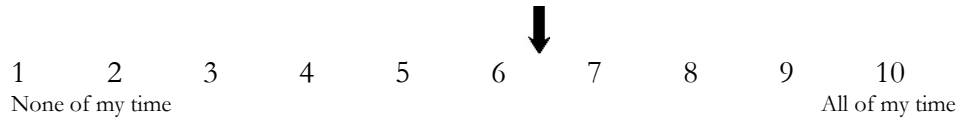
= 7.0
 $\sigma = 2.1$



Applying Scientific Knowledge

Applying scientific knowledge received an upper mid-range rating of 6.4. Scientific knowledge is applied in determining dosage ranges and adjustments necessary taking into account some of the pharmacokinetic considerations that need to be incorporated regarding this population.

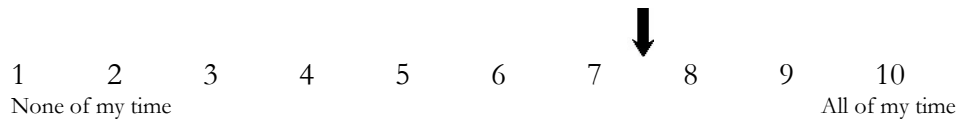
$$= 6.4$$
$$\sigma = 1.9$$



Applying Medical Knowledge

Applying medical knowledge received a higher rating at 7.5. Medical knowledge is applied in patient counseling, medication regimens, patient profile reviews, and collaboration with other professionals.

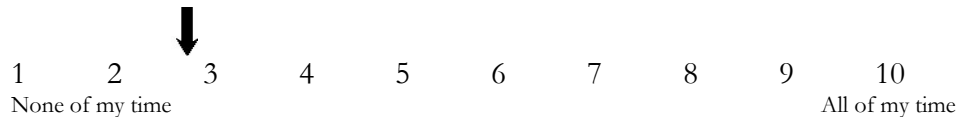
$$= 7.5$$
$$\sigma = 1.5$$



Creating New Knowledge by Conducting Research

Long-term care is a prime example of a setting designed mostly for the application of learned knowledge. It is the arena where the results of pharmaceutical research and studies are used to improve patient lives. There are some opportunities to conduct research in the long-term care setting, mostly in the realm of disease state management. However, for the most part, this setting is where knowledge is applied.

$$= 2.7$$
$$\sigma = 2.1$$



Management/Supervision of Others

Respondents rated the factor mid-range with a 4.8, indicating that they tend to spend a lower amount of time supervising others. However, staff pharmacists still maintain a supervisory role because, when on duty, they are responsible for the conduct and practice in that pharmacy.

$$= 4.8$$
$$\sigma = 2.9$$



Job-Sharing Opportunities

Long-term care pharmacists indicated a low range response to job-sharing at 3.2.

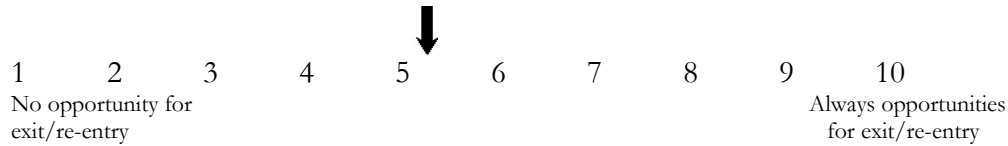
= 3.2
 $\sigma = 3.2$



Exit/Re-entry Opportunities

Opportunities do exist to exit/re-entry. The difficulty is being able to re-enter the same position.

= 5.2
 $\sigma = 3.0$



Parental Leave Opportunities

Many long-term care pharmacies are parts of larger organizations that offer parental leave as a benefit. Respondents gave this factor a rating of 7.0.

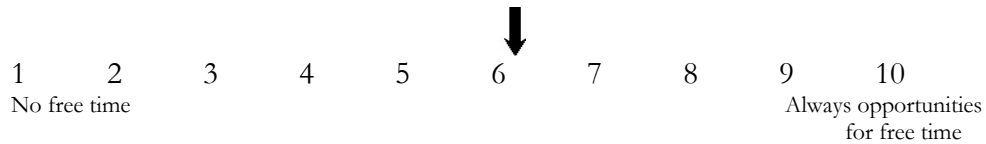
= 7.0
 $\sigma = 3.1$



Leisure/Family Time

Respondents rated this factor a 6.1, indicating that many feel they have time available for leisure activities and family.

= 6.1
 $\sigma = 2.3$



Job Security

Job security was rated in the mid-range area by these pharmacists. With the continued shortage in some areas, long-term care pharmacists indicated a sense of job security.

= 6.8
 $\sigma = 2.4$



Opportunities for Advancement

Respondents rated this factor mid-range with respect to opportunities for advancement. Career advancement can often be limited by the size of the organization and the size of the pharmacy. For pharmacists working in a company with only one nursing home under contract, there may not be the opportunity to go beyond chief pharmacist. However, in a larger company, they may have more versatility to choose the corporate ladder approach in their career.

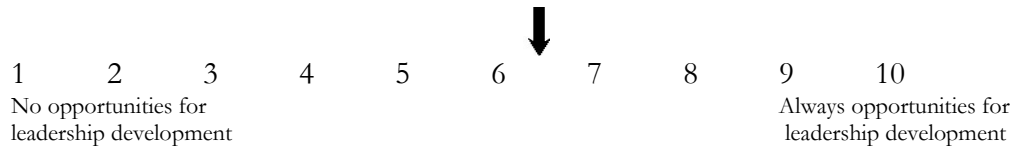
= 5.3
 $\sigma = 2.7$



Opportunities for Leadership Development

While pharmacists see only limited chance for advancement, they see a greater opportunity for leadership development. With a rating of 6.4, long-term care pharmacists see a great deal of leadership opportunity.

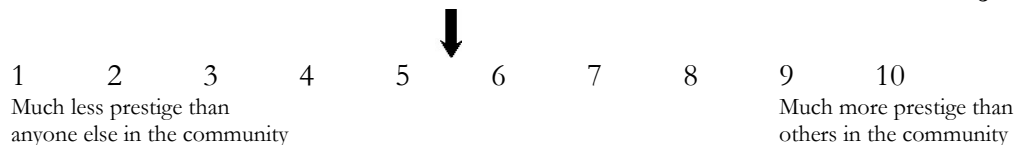
= 6.4
 $\sigma = 3.0$



Community Prestige

Long-term care pharmacists gave this factor a 5.5 rating. Pharmacists can become well known in their community for helping individuals. Long-term care pharmacists are simply looked to as confidants because they are a familiar face and a trusted health care professional in the long-term care community.

= 5.5
 $\sigma = 2.5$



Professional Involvement

Professional involvement of individual pharmacists is critical to the development of the profession as a whole, and pharmacists need to communicate with each other so that the profession can continue to advance in providing optimal health care for the public. Long-term care pharmacists rated this factor in the upper mid-range at 7.4.

= 7.4
 $\sigma = 2.8$



Income

Respondents indicated that they tend toward feeling properly compensated for the work they perform.

= 7.2
 $\sigma = 2.1$



Benefits (vacation, health, retirement)

Often directly linked to income or salary, benefits scored slightly above income at a rating of 7.6.

= 7.6
 $\sigma = 2.3$



Geographic Location

Geographic location was given the third-highest rating among critical success factors in this profile at 7.7. Long-term care pharmacists have great opportunity to relocate almost anywhere in the United States.

= 7.7
 $\sigma = 2.5$



Autonomy

Autonomy in a long-term care pharmacy, in general, can depend on whether the pharmacist works alone or always works with another pharmacist or supervisor. One of the liberties of being a pharmacist in practice is that the pharmacist on duty has final say in most decisions that occur under his or her supervision. In most cases, long-term care pharmacists are highly autonomous.

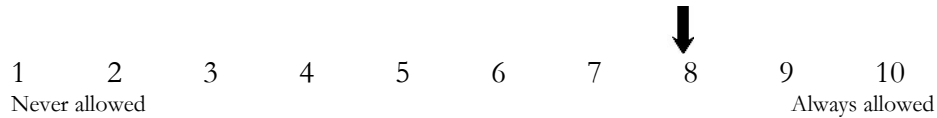
= 7.4
 $\sigma = 2.2$



Self-Worth

Respondents rated self-worth as the second-highest factor in this profile. Although the focus of the long-term care pharmacist is to help improve the lives of their residents through the use of prescription medications, many feel that they are helping not only the patients but their patients' families as well. Intrinsically, this act creates a great deal of self-worth and the feeling of accomplishment in the pharmacist's daily work.

= 7.9
 $\sigma = 2.0$



Future Focus

The majority of what a long-term care pharmacist may be addressing is the immediate needs of patients. However, reviewing drug regimens and suggesting changes also can be forward looking. Pharmacists indicated that they have a tendency to focus on the future with a score of 6.9.

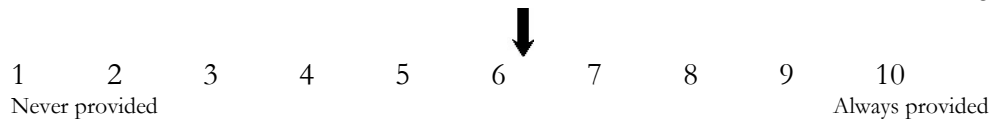
= 6.9
 $\sigma = 2.0$



Professional Prestige

Professional prestige is related to the earlier rating on collaboration with other professionals. Since long-term care pharmacists are typically involved directly with other health care providers, they can become well known professionally. In addition, long-term care pharmacists can develop a reputation in the long-term care community for providing thoughtful and thorough service, reflecting the rating of 6.2.

= 6.2
 $\sigma = 2.9$



Unique Practice Environment

The opportunity for a unique practice environment is very dependent on the management philosophy of the particular pharmacy organization and the nursing homes where they operate. Long-term care pharmacists rated this factor at 6.8.

= 6.8
 $\sigma = 2.5$



Advanced Degree

Respondents rated this factor in the lower range indicating that, for the most part, advanced degrees are not typically required. The vast majority of pharmacists are able to complete their work with the initial degree they received and additional specialized training.

= 3.5
 $\sigma = 3.4$



Entrepreneurial Opportunity

There is limited entrepreneurial opportunity available in long-term care pharmacy. Perhaps the greatest opportunity is for consultants in this field because they have the opportunity to work with a variety of groups and create a niche for their practice.

= 4.3
 $\sigma = 3.2$



Additional Training

Respondents rated this factor the highest across the entire profile. Certificate training programs are available in geriatric pharmacy along with other programs geared toward this patient population. Some states require certification to serve as a “consultant pharmacist.” A high range rating of 8.9 testifies to the importance of additional training to serve the geriatric patient population.

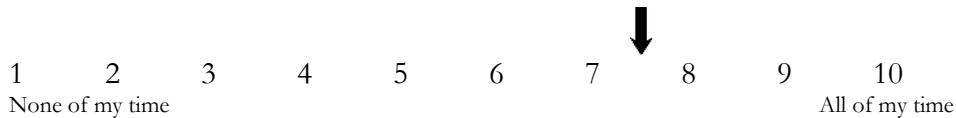
= 8.9
 $\sigma = 1.8$



Interacting With Colleagues

As one would suspect, respondents indicated that they interact with coworkers on a daily basis.

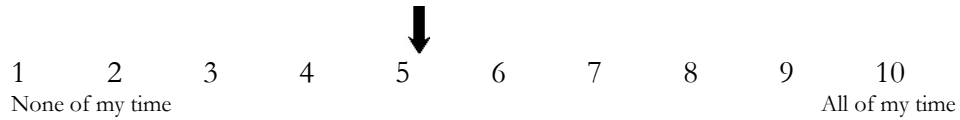
= 7.5
 $\sigma = 2.1$



Travel

Long-term care pharmacists are split with their needs to travel for their day-to-day activities as seen with the mid-range rating of 5.1. Again, this may be due to a number of respondents who consult in the field versus those who have a permanent practice location. In addition, some pharmacists work for an organization with multiple sites and may need to travel to different locations.

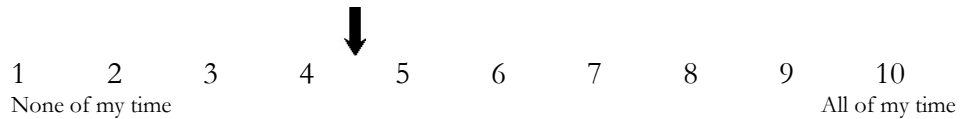
= 5.1
 $\sigma = 3.2$



Writing

Respondents were in the mid-range regarding writing, rating the factor at 4.5.

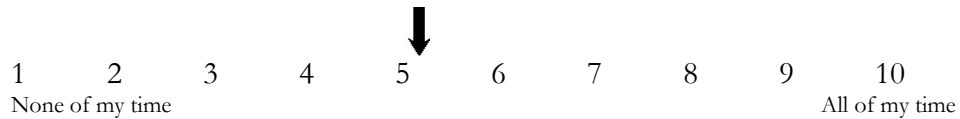
= 4.5
 $\sigma = 2.3$



Working With Teams

Respondents indicated they tended toward the middle with regard to working in teams, giving this factor a rating of 5.1. This rating may take into account that the staff of some organizations work together and can communicate regularly when needed, whereas those who work solely in the pharmacy may not work in teams.

= 5.1
 $\sigma = 2.7$



“On Call”

Respondents indicated a low range “on call” need for the positions with a rating of 3.0.

= 3.0
 $\sigma = 3.1$



Work on Holidays

Long-term care pharmacists indicated that they are in the low range regarding working holidays, rating this factor at 3.1

= 3.1
 $\sigma = 2.7$



Work on Weekends

Respondents indicated that they work more weekends than holidays as noted by the 3.9 rating.



Presentations

Long-term care pharmacists indicated that they spend some time giving presentations. This can be related to in-service programs for other health care professionals as well as presentations at meetings.



Mean Scores for Critical Factors

1. Interaction With Patients	4.3
2. Conducting Physical Assessments	1.8
3. Interpreting Laboratory Values	4.1
4. Continuity of Relationships	6.2
5. Helping People	4.9
6. Collaboration With Other Professionals	7.0
7. Educating Other Professionals	5.7
8. Variety of Daily Activities	7.0
9. Multiple Task Handling	6.8
10. Problem Solving	5.8
11. Focus of Expertise	5.3
12. Innovative Thinking	6.3
13. Applying Scientific Knowledge	6.4
14. Applying Medical Knowledge	7.5
15. Creating New Knowledge by Conducting Research	2.7
16. Management/Supervision of Others	4.8
17. Management/Supervision of a Business	3.7
18. Pressure/Stress	6.5
19. Work Schedule	5.6
20. Part-Time Opportunities	5.4
21. Job-Sharing Opportunities	3.2
22. Exit/Re-entry Opportunities	5.2
23. Parental Leave Opportunities	7.0
24. Leisure/Family Time	6.1
25. Job Security	6.8
26. Opportunities for Advancement	5.3
27. Opportunities for Leadership Development	6.4
28. Community Prestige	5.5
29. Professional Involvement	7.4
30. Income	7.2
31. Benefits (vacation, health, retirement)	7.6
32. Geographic Location	7.7
33. Autonomy	7.4
34. Self-Worth	7.9
35. Future Focus	6.9
36. Professional Prestige	6.2
37. Unique Practice Environment	6.8
38. Advanced Degree	3.5
39. Entrepreneurial Opportunity	4.3
40. Additional Training	8.9
41. Interacting With Colleagues	7.5
42. Travel	5.1
43. Writing	4.5
44. Working With Teams	5.1
45. "On Call"	3.0
46. Work on Holidays	3.1
47. Work on Weekends	3.9
48. Presentations	4.3

Reference

Schommer JC, Brown LM, Sogol EM. *Career Pathway Evaluation Program 2007 Pharmacist Profile Survey*. June 2007.

Professional Organizations

American Health Care Association (AHCA)
1201 L Street NW, Washington, DC 20005
Tel: 202-842-4444 Fax: 202-842-3860
www.ahca.org

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 Consultant Pharmacists (ASCP)
1321 Duke Street, Alexandria, VA 22314
Tel: 703-739-1300 Fax: 703- 739-1321
www.ascp.com

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

National Pharmaceutical Association (NPhA)
107 Kilmayne Drive, Suite C, Cary, NC 27511
Tel: 800-944-NPhA Fax: 919-469-5870
www.npha.net

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.