

## Mail Service

### Background

Mail service pharmacy has changed over the past decade with more third-party insurance organizations, public and private employers, and Internet pharmacy service expansion. Insurance coverage for many plans includes a mail service option, which may reduce the overall co-payment for the patient and can provide an extended supply of medication (up to 3 months).

While, historically, mail service pharmacy had been utilized purely for medication dispensing, today's mail service pharmacist can be involved in broader patient care. A respondent from Nevada indicated liking "being able to focus on patient care and satisfaction." Another from Texas provided insight into the newer roles that pharmacists now have in mail service, stating enjoyment in "being a counseling pharmacist in mail order, even though [you] don't see the patients you are speaking to, you are helping people and saving lives every single day."

Twenty-three percent of respondent's time is spent on medication dispensing, including associated patient counseling. In addition, time required for two categories were listed at 17% each: health professional consulting and patient care services (e.g., disease management, medication therapy management). This was followed by 11% of time for organization and business management, and 9% for personnel management. The other time is split across a number of different functions with 13% allocated to "other" activities.

### Characteristics

Twenty five mail service pharmacists responded to the 2012 *APhA Career Pathway Evaluation Program* survey. Seventy-one percent of respondents held an entry-level pharmacy degree, with 16% having a PharmD degree. Seven percent indicated they earned an advanced degree (MA, MS, MBA, PhD, or other). Only 3% had completed some type of certificate training and 2% had been through a residency program.

Respondents' average age was 43 years old. Just under two thirds (60%) of respondents were male. Twenty-nine percent indicated some type of management role. Income data show 36% earn between \$80,000–100,000, while 60% earn \$100,000 or more per year, and 2% indicated they earn more than \$170,000. The average time worked per week was 42 hours. Respondents represented eight states with the majority of respondents from Texas and Nevada.

Respondents indicated that they were satisfied with their work, with 35% indicating "extremely satisfied" and 50% indicating "somewhat satisfied." On a similar scale, respondents said they felt the work was challenging, with 21% indicating "extremely challenging" and 60% indicating "somewhat challenging."

An Ohio respondent indicated that mail service pharmacy is a "constantly changing

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environment with challenging and rewarding opportunities.”

### **Insider’s Perspective**

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

Twenty-nine percent of the respondents indicated that patient care was the most appealing aspect of their work. A Texas respondent found that “working in mail order [there was] more time to counsel patients than ever.”

Twenty-four percent of the respondents indicated that the hours/schedule was a most appealing aspect of the position. A Texas respondent stated having “sufficient time to take care of each patient—great schedule.”

An additional 7% indicated that the benefits were appealing as well.

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

In contrast to the most appealing aspects, 17% stated that they have to deal with non-pharmacy issues and insurance coverage, which is a least appealing aspect of the position. An additional two areas were both mentioned 8% of the time as being least appealing aspects: repetition and schedule. This is of interest because schedule also was listed by some respondents as an appealing aspect of the position. Perhaps this discrepancy depends somewhat on the specific mail service environment, which was highlighted by a Nevada respondent who summed up both of these issues when stating that the least appealing aspects were the “repetitive [nature of the work] and the frequent schedule changes.”

#### **What advice should students consider when selecting the option of working in mail service pharmacy?**

No one single theme emerged from respondents as they provided insight across a wide variety of areas. A Virginia mail service pharmacist stated that one must “be able to communicate well—[especially] with upset members on occasion.” A Nevada respondent thought it important to let others know that they need an “enhanced grasp of drug information.”



### Collaboration with Other Professionals

Mail service pharmacists indicate that they spend a limited amount of time collaborating with other professionals. Most of their interactions with other professionals are related to product and insurance issues.

= 4.0



### Educating Other Professionals

Mail service pharmacists spend a limited amount of time educating other professionals, as noted by the 3.0 rating for this factor.

= 3.0



### Variety of Daily Activities

Respondents reported a mid-range rating for variety of daily activities.

= 4.7



### Multiple Task Handling

Because of the nature of the environment, mail service pharmacists indicate that they tend to work more on a lower number of issues versus multitasking.

= 4.6



### Problem Solving

For the most part, respondents tend to look to tried-and-true solutions to solve problems. There are times when newer ideas are considered to solve more complex situations.

= 3.5



### Focus of Expertise

Respondents tend to be aligned in the generalist area of practice because they need to be able to look across a variety of disease states, clinical ramifications, and a very diverse patient population.

= 5.1



### Innovative Thinking

In response to the question “To what extent does your practice involve generating new ideas (innovative thinking) pertaining to pharmacy?” respondents were in the mid-range with a rating of 4.2, indicating that their practice does provide some opportunity for innovative thinking but it’s not the main part of their day

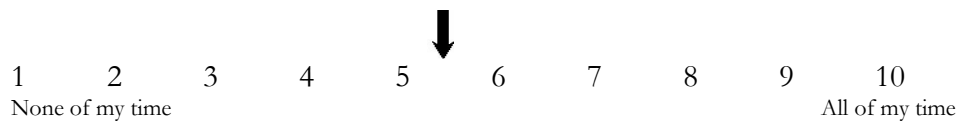
= 4.2



### Applying Scientific Knowledge

Applying scientific knowledge received a mid-range rating of 5.4. The application of scientific knowledge is applied broadly, again taking into account the diverse population mix.

= 5.4



### Applying Medical Knowledge

Applying medical knowledge received a higher rating at 6.8. Medical knowledge is applied in patient counseling, medication regimens, patient profile reviews, and collaboration with other professionals. When considering mail service pharmacists working at call centers, one can see how they apply this knowledge regularly.

= 6.8



### Creating New Knowledge by Conducting Research

Mail service pharmacy is a setting designed mostly for the application of learned knowledge. It is an environment that uses the results of pharmaceutical research and studies to help improve patient lives.

= 2.7



### Management/Supervision of Others

Respondents rated this factor with a lower range score of 2.9, indicating that they tend to spend a lower amount of time supervising others. However, mail service pharmacists with a

dispensing position still maintain a supervisory role because, when on duty, they are responsible for the conduct and practice in that pharmacy.

= 2.9



### Management/Supervision of a Business

Respondents indicated they spend even less time managing the business side of the practice.

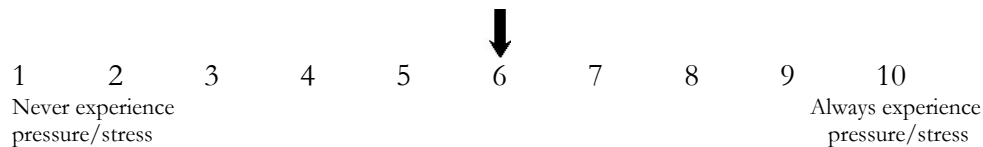
= 2.9



### Pressure/Stress

Respondents indicated that they experience pressure or stress more often than not in their practice. Stress comes from the multiple demands depending on the role of the pharmacist. Those in the call center are constantly communicating with others. When this is added to the stress caused by the dispensing pharmacy functions, it is easy to see why these pharmacists feel pressure and stress in their work.

= 6.0



### Work Schedule

Respondents rated this factor the third highest in the profile with a rating of 7.6. In addition, mail service pharmacists were tied with chain management for rating this factor the highest in the entire survey. While schedule was listed in both the most and least appealing aspects sections, it is clear that mail service pharmacists have a more regular/predictable schedule.

= 7.6



### Part-Time Opportunities

Respondents rated this factor in the low-range at 3.8, indicating that there are limited opportunities for part-time work in the field.

= 3.8



### Job-Sharing Opportunities

Similar to the above factor, respondents indicated that there are limited opportunities for job-sharing.

= 2.0



### Exit/Re-entry Opportunities

While respondents' ratings were in the mid-range at 4.3, the opportunities for exit/re-entry are limited.

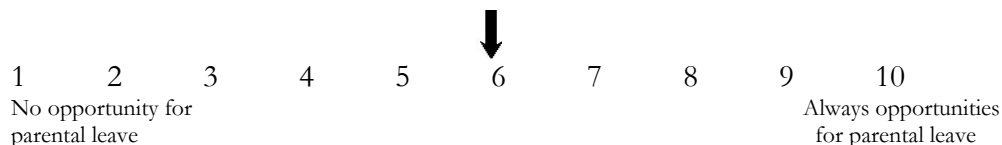
= 4.3



### Parental Leave Opportunities

Mail service pharmacists indicated that parental leave was one of the benefits available to them.

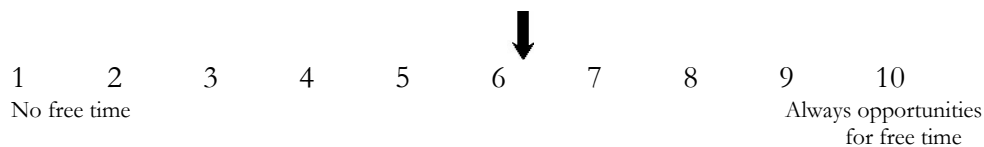
= 5.9



### Leisure/Family Time

Respondents rated this factor 6.2, indicating that many feel they have time available for leisure activities and family.

= 6.2



### Job Security

Job security is in the mid-range for mail service pharmacists with a rating of 5.0, indicating that these pharmacists feel they have decent job stability and security.

= 5.0



### Opportunities for Advancement

Respondents rated opportunities for advancement in the mid-range. Career advancement often can be limited by the size of the organization and the size of the pharmacy. Larger mail service pharmacies offer greater variety in advancement opportunities.

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= 4.0



### Opportunities for Leadership Development

Respondents see the opportunity for leadership development at the same level as advancement opportunities.

= 5.1



### Community Prestige

Mail service pharmacists indicated that they are mid-range in rating their community prestige. Many times community prestige is also related to the organization that employs the pharmacist. Because mail service pharmacists do not directly interact with local patients, many in the community are not aware of the role that pharmacists have within the organizations.

= 4.8



### 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 the profession can continue to advance in providing optimum health care for the public. Mail service respondents were mid-range in the rating of this factor.

= 5.1



### Income

Respondents indicated that they feel properly compensated for their work as they gave this factor a rating of 6.8.

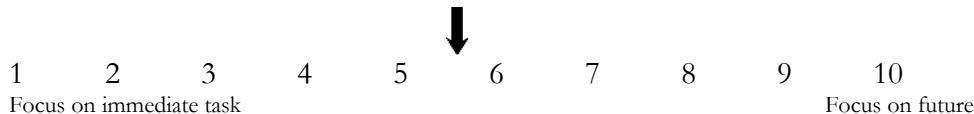
= 6.8







= 4.6



**Professional Prestige**

Mail service pharmacists have some direct contact with other health professionals, however this is on a limited basis. One respondent expressed concern that the clinical nature of the work is not given time in professional journals, which would provide a greater opportunity for professional prestige.

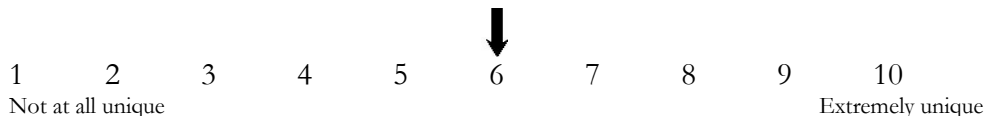
= 3.1



**Unique Practice Environment**

The opportunity for a unique practice environment depends on the management philosophy of the particular pharmacy organization. Mail service pharmacists gave this factor a 6.0 rating.

= 6.0



**Advanced Degree**

Respondents rated this factor in the lower range, indicating that advanced degrees are not typically required. The vast majority of pharmacists are able to complete their work with an entry-level pharmacy degree.

= 3.4



**Entrepreneurial Opportunity**

There is limited entrepreneurial opportunity available in mail service pharmacy as noted by the 2.6 rating.

= 2.6



**Additional Training**

For those who work in the call center of a mail service pharmacy, additional training is necessary regarding policies and procedures as well as appropriate use of technology. A lower range rating of 4.4 shows that additional training isn't always necessary.

= 4.4



**Interacting With Colleagues**

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

= 5.6



**Travel**

Mail service pharmacists rated this factor 1.9, indicating that travel is not required for daily activities.

= 1.8



**Writing**

Respondents were in the low-range regarding writing, rating the factor at 2.5. Some information needs to be documented in the call center, however this is minimal compared with the time required for other functions.

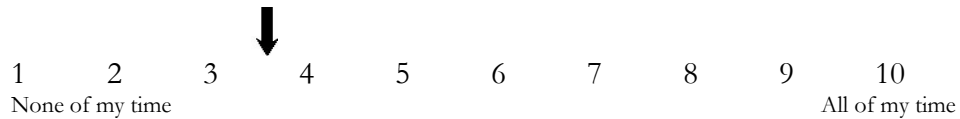
= 2.5



**Working with Teams**

Respondents indicated they tended toward the low mid-range (3.6) with regard to working in teams. 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.

= 3.6



### Mean Scores for Critical Factors

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| 1. Interaction with people                        | 4.0 |
| 2. Performing physical assessments                | 1.9 |
| 3. Interpreting laboratory values                 | 2.5 |
| 4. Continuity of relationships                    | 3.4 |
| 5. Extent to which effect is direct               | 4.9 |
| 6. Collaboration with other professionals         | 4.0 |
| 7. Educating other professionals                  | 3.0 |
| 8. Variety of daily activities                    | 4.7 |
| 9. Multiple task handling                         | 4.6 |
| 10. Problem solving                               | 3.5 |
| 11. Focus of expertise                            | 5.1 |
| 12. Innovative thinking                           | 4.2 |
| 13. Applying scientific knowledge                 | 5.4 |
| 14. Applying medical knowledge                    | 6.8 |
| 15. Creating new knowledge by conducting research | 2.7 |
| 16. Managing others                               | 2.9 |
| 17. Managing business operations                  | 2.9 |
| 18. Pressure/Stress                               | 6.0 |
| 19. Work schedule                                 | 7.6 |
| 20. Part time opportunities                       | 3.8 |
| 21. Job sharing                                   | 2.0 |
| 22. Exit and re-entry                             | 4.3 |
| 23. Parental leave                                | 5.9 |
| 24. Free time for leisure/family activities       | 6.2 |
| 25. Job security                                  | 5.0 |
| 26. Opportunities for advancement                 | 4.0 |
| 27. Opportunities for leadership development      | 3.7 |
| 28. Community prestige                            | 4.1 |
| 29. Professional involvement                      | 4.2 |
| 30. Income  | 6.8 |
| 31. Benefits (vacation, health, retirement)       | 7.7 |
| 32. Geographic location                           | 3.5 |
| 33. Working Remotely                              | 3.6 |
| 34. Autonomy                                      | 4.7 |
| 35. Self-Worth                                    | 5.3 |
| 36. Future focus                                  | 4.6 |
| 37. Professional prestige                         | 3.1 |
| 38. Unique practice environment                   | 6.0 |
| 39. Advanced degree                               | 3.4 |
| 40. Entrepreneurial opportunity                   | 2.6 |
| 41. Additional training                           | 4.4 |
| 42. Interacting with co-workers                   | 5.6 |
| 43. Travel  | 1.8 |
| 44. Writing                                       | 2.5 |
| 45. Working with teams                            | 3.6 |

**Reference**

Schommer JC. *APhA Career Pathway Evaluation Program for Pharmacy Professionals 20012Pharmacist Profile Survey*. February 2013.

**Professional Organizations**

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