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. In addition, many mail service providers now have toll-free numbers for patients to call health care professionals with questions about the medication(s) they are taking. 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

Fifty-eight mail service pharmacists responded to the 2007 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 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.” Another respondent from Nevada was concerned with “the poor coverage given by most pharmacy journals/associations.”

**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.” Another Nevada respondent stated the importance of “being a people person if [they] want to be [a] counseling pharmacist.”
Critical Factor Ratings

Interaction With Patients
Respondents rated this factor in the upper mid-range at 7.1. Many respondents commented that their interactions with patients were very appealing.

\[ \mu = 7.1 \]
\[ \sigma = 3.4 \]

Conducting Physical Assessments
Mail service pharmacists have very little opportunity to conduct physical assessments, as noted by the rating of 2.2.

\[ \mu = 2.2 \]
\[ \sigma = 2.1 \]

Interpreting Laboratory Values
Respondents have little to no access to laboratory values and rated this factor at 1.8, which is the lowest rating for this profile.

\[ \mu = 1.8 \]
\[ \sigma = 1.2 \]

Continuity of Relationships
Because of the nature of the environment, mail service pharmacists do not usually have ongoing/long-term relationships with specific patients. Their work is across multiple patients and if a patient calls back for a follow-up question, a different pharmacist will likely take the call.

\[ \mu = 2.6 \]
\[ \sigma = 2.3 \]
Helping People
Mail service respondents were mixed in their response with a mid-range rating of 6.0. This may be the result of interpretation for direct versus indirect care. Pharmacists in this environment rarely have face-to-face direct care; however, the care can still be considered direct if they are working with the patient, even on the telephone.

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Helping People} & \quad \text{Rating: 6.0} \\
\sigma & \quad = 2.9
\end{align*}
\]

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.

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Collaboration With Other Professionals} & \quad \text{Rating: 3.7} \\
\sigma & \quad = 2.5
\end{align*}
\]

Educating Other Professionals
Mail service pharmacists spend a limited amount of time educating other professionals, as noted by the 3.2 rating for this factor.

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Educating Other Professionals} & \quad \text{Rating: 3.2} \\
\sigma & \quad = 2.3
\end{align*}
\]

Variety of Daily Activities
Respondents reported a mid-range rating for variety of daily activities. This factor was listed as one of the least appealing aspects for the group.

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Variety of Daily Activities} & \quad \text{Rating: 5.2} \\
\sigma & \quad = 3.1
\end{align*}
\]

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 verses multitasking.

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Multiple Task Handling} & \quad \text{Rating: 4.6} \\
\sigma & \quad = 3.1
\end{align*}
\]
**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.

\[
\begin{align*}
1 & \quad 2 & \quad 3 & \quad 4 & \quad 5 & \quad 6 & \quad 7 & \quad 8 & \quad 9 & \quad 10 \\
\text{Always tried and true} & & & & & \quad \quad & & & \quad \quad \text{Always untested alternatives}
\end{align*}
\]

\[\bar{X} = 4.4 \quad \sigma = 2.1\]

**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.

\[
\begin{align*}
1 & \quad 2 & \quad 3 & \quad 4 & \quad 5 & \quad 6 & \quad 7 & \quad 8 & \quad 9 & \quad 10 \\
\text{Generally defined area} & & & & & \quad \quad & & & \quad \quad \text{Sharply defined area}
\end{align*}
\]

\[\bar{X} = 4.4 \quad \sigma = 2.5\]

**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 5.1, indicating that their practice does provide some opportunity for innovative thinking.

\[
\begin{align*}
1 & \quad 2 & \quad 3 & \quad 4 & \quad 5 & \quad 6 & \quad 7 & \quad 8 & \quad 9 & \quad 10 \\
\text{Never involves innovative thinking} & & & & & \quad \quad & & & \quad \quad \text{Always involves innovative thinking}
\end{align*}
\]

\[\bar{X} = 5.1 \quad \sigma = 2.6\]

**Applying Scientific Knowledge**
Applying scientific knowledge received a mid-range rating of 5.6. The application of scientific knowledge is applied broadly, again taking into account the diverse population mix.

\[
\begin{align*}
1 & \quad 2 & \quad 3 & \quad 4 & \quad 5 & \quad 6 & \quad 7 & \quad 8 & \quad 9 & \quad 10 \\
\text{None of my time} & & & & & \quad \quad & & & \quad \quad \text{All of my time}
\end{align*}
\]

\[\bar{X} = 5.6 \quad \sigma = 2.5\]
**Applying Medical Knowledge**
Applying medical knowledge received a higher rating at 6.9. 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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rating</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>6.9</td>
<td>2.3</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time Spent</th>
<th>Rating</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>None of my time</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All of my time</td>
<td>6.9</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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</table>

**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.

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>2.2</td>
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</table>

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Time Spent</th>
<th>Rating</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>None of my time</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All of my time</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Management/Supervision of Others**
Respondents rated this factor mid-range with a 3.9, 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.

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<tr>
<td>1</td>
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<th>Standard Deviation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>None of my time</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All of my time</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Management/Supervision of a Business**
Respondents indicated they spend even less time managing the business side of the practice.

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<th>Standard Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>3.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time Spent</th>
<th>Rating</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>None of my time</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All of my time</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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.

$\mu = 6.3$
$\sigma = 2.5$

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
<th>10</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Never experience pressure/stress</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Always experience pressure/stress</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Work Schedule
Respondents rated this factor the third highest in the profile with a rating of 8.2. 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.

$\mu = 8.2$
$\sigma = 2.5$

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1</th>
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<th>4</th>
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<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
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<th>10</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Irregular/unpredictable</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Regular/predictable</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Part-Time Opportunities
Respondents rated this factor in the low-range at 2.5, indicating that there are limited opportunities for part-time work in the field.

$\mu = 2.5$
$\sigma = 2.2$

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1</th>
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<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
<th>10</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No opportunity for part-time employment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Always opportunities for part-time employment</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

$\mu = 2.5$
$\sigma = 2.6$

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
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<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
<th>10</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No opportunity for job-sharing</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Always opportunities for job-sharing</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Exit/Re-entry Opportunities
While respondents’ ratings were in the mid-range at 4.0, the opportunities for exit/re-entry are limited.

\[ \mu = 4.0 \]
\[ \sigma = 3.0 \]

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
No opportunity for exit/re-entry
Always opportunities for exit/re-entry

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

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

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
No opportunity for parental leave
Always opportunities for parental leave

Leisure/Family Time
Respondents rated this factor 6.0, indicating that many feel they have time available for leisure activities and family.

\[ \mu = 6.0 \]
\[ \sigma = 3.0 \]

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
No free time
Always opportunities for free time

Job Security
Job security is in the upper mid-range for mail service pharmacists with a rating of 7.5, indicating that these pharmacists feel they have good job stability and security.

\[ \mu = 7.5 \]
\[ \sigma = 1.9 \]

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
No security/stability
Total security/stability

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.

\[ \mu = 5.1 \]
\[ \sigma = 2.6 \]

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
No opportunities for advancement
Always opportunities for advancement
Opportunities for Leadership Development
Respondents see the opportunity for leadership development at the same level as advancement opportunities.

\[\mu = 5.1, \sigma = 3.0\]

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
No opportunities for leadership development Always opportunities for leadership development

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 pharmacies are newer entities, many in the community are not aware of the role that pharmacists have within the organizations.

\[\mu = 4.8, \sigma = 2.4\]

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Much less prestige than anyone else in the community Much more prestige than others in the community

Professional Involvement
As stated in many profiles, 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.

\[\mu = 5.1, \sigma = 2.9\]

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
No opportunity for professional involvement Always an opportunity for professional involvement

Income
Respondents indicated that they feel properly compensated for their work as they gave this factor a rating of 7.6.

\[\mu = 7.6, \sigma = 2.0\]

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Not properly compensated Properly compensated
Benefits (vacation, health, retirement)
Often directly linked to income or salary, benefits scored slightly above income at a rating of 8.3. This is the second-highest rated factor in this profile.

= 8.3  
σ = 1.7

Geographic Location
Respondents indicated that they are mid-range regarding the ability to practice anywhere. The rating of 5.1 is an indication that there is some flexibility in geographic location. However, geographic flexibility is limited as revealed by the respondents themselves; 85% of these pharmacists were from two states—Texas and Nevada.

= 5.1  
σ = 2.9

Autonomy
Autonomy in mail service pharmacy depends on whether the pharmacists work alone or if they work with other pharmacists or supervisors. Respondents rated this factor in the mid-range.

= 5.2  
σ = 2.7

Self-Worth
Mail service respondents rated this factor in the mid-range at 6.0. These pharmacists work with patients to provide both product and information.

= 6.0  
σ = 2.7
**Future Focus**
Mail service pharmacists tend to work more on addressing the immediate needs of patients. Taking into consideration that most patient contact is driven by the patient with an immediate need, one can see why these pharmacists rated this factor at 4.7.

![Rating Chart for Future Focus]

- **Focus on immediate task**
- **Focus on future**

**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.

![Rating Chart for Professional Prestige]

- **Never provided**
- **Always provided**

**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 6.8 rating.

![Rating Chart for Unique Practice Environment]

- **Not at all unique**
- **Extremely unique**

**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.

![Rating Chart for Advanced Degree]

- **Advanced degree not required**
- **Advanced degree required**
Entrepreneurial Opportunity
There is limited entrepreneurial opportunity available in mail service pharmacy as noted by the 2.6 rating.

\[ = 2.6 \]
\[ \sigma = 2.2 \]

Additional Training
Respondents rated this factor the highest across the entire profile. 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 high range rating of 8.4 testifies to the importance of additional training.

\[ = 8.4 \]
\[ \sigma = 2.5 \]

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

\[ = 6.3 \]
\[ \sigma = 2.7 \]

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

\[ = 1.9 \]
\[ \sigma = 1.6 \]

Writing
Respondents were in the low mid-range regarding writing, rating the factor at 3.4. Some information needs to be documented in the call center, however this is minimal compared with the time required for other functions.

\[ = 3.4 \]
\[ \sigma = 2.8 \]
**Working With Teams**
Respondents indicated they tended toward the low mid-range (4.4) 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.

\[ \mu = 4.4 \]
\[ \sigma = 3.2 \]

- 1  2  3  4  5  6  7  8  9  10
- None of my time  All of my time

**“On Call”**
Respondents indicated a low range “on call” need for the positions with a rating of 2.2.

\[ \mu = 2.2 \]
\[ \sigma = 2.6 \]

- 1  2  3  4  5  6  7  8  9  10
- Never “on call”  Always “on call”

**Work on Holidays**
Mail service pharmacists indicated that they are in the low range regarding working holidays with a rating of 2.7.

\[ \mu = 2.7 \]
\[ \sigma = 2.3 \]

- 1  2  3  4  5  6  7  8  9  10
- Never work on holidays  Always work on holidays

**Work on Weekends**
Respondents indicated that they do work more weekends than holidays, as noted by the 5.3 rating.

\[ \mu = 5.3 \]
\[ \sigma = 3.4 \]

- 1  2  3  4  5  6  7  8  9  10
- Never work on weekends  Always work on weekends

**Presentations**
Respondents indicated that they spend little time giving presentations, as noted by the 2.6 rating for the factor.

\[ \mu = 2.6 \]
\[ \sigma = 2.2 \]

- 1  2  3  4  5  6  7  8  9  10
- None of my time  All of my time
### Mean Scores for Critical Factors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Score</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>Pressure/Stress</td>
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<td>Work Schedule</td>
<td>8.2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Part-Time Opportunities</td>
<td>2.5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Job-Sharing Opportunities</td>
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<td>Exit/Re-entry Opportunities</td>
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<td>Future Focus</td>
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<td>Unique Practice Environment</td>
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<td>Advanced Degree</td>
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<td>Additional Training</td>
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<td>Interacting With Colleagues</td>
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<td>Travel</td>
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<td>Writing</td>
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<td>“On Call”</td>
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<td>Work on Weekends</td>
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<td>Presentations</td>
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</table>
Reference


Professional Organizations

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.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.