

Chain Community Pharmacy

Background

Chain pharmacy provides two primary career paths for pharmacists: management and staff. As a general definition, a community pharmacy is considered a “chain community pharmacy” if the organization consists of four or more stores.

Community pharmacy is often seen as an excellent opportunity to conduct basic preliminary health assessments of patients. Quick evaluation of symptoms, laboratory values, and other indicators can be helpful in directing patients’ therapy, especially as the community pharmacists’ role in overall patient care continues to expand, such as by providing immunizations and medication therapy management (MTM) services.

In chain community pharmacy, the breadth of duties of a manager is defined by the size and requirements of the pharmacy or organization. At the store level, the pharmacy manager is typically in charge of the staff, patient care services, inventory management, recruitment, training and development, and general business management. In larger chains, especially those that are corporately owned or franchised, there are many more levels of management that extend from district managers to pharmacy operation executives, with the scope of responsibilities expanding accordingly. Pharmacists are critical in upper management of corporate chains because they provide real-world practice knowledge and experience when making crucial pharmacy business decisions. More details about this type of role can be found in the profile for Corporate Management.

As the provision of pharmacists’ patient care services within the community setting expands, there are new positions emerging in chain community pharmacy that are focused on the management and training of pharmacists delivering these services. The role of these pharmacists – whose titles may include “clinical coordinators” – varies in different chains but can include providing direct patient care to many pharmacies within a district, training staff pharmacists to provide new clinical services, seeking out contracts with local health care payers such as employers, public health entities and collaborating with other health care providers.

Characteristics

One-hundred sixty-nine chain community pharmacists responded to the 2012 *APhA Career Pathway Evaluation Program* Survey. Forty-nine percent reported having a PharmD degree. Seventeen percent had obtained an advanced degree such as an MA, MS, MBA, PhD, or other. Six percent had been through a residency, 45% had some type of certification, and 8% had completed some other type of training.

Respondents’ average age was 46 years old. Slightly more than half (57%) of respondents were female. Income data show 27% earn less than \$100,000 (includes those working part time) and 48% earn \$100,000 - \$130,000. The average time worked per week was 46 hours.

Most of respondents indicated that they were satisfied with their work, with 23% indicating “extremely satisfied” and 44% indicating “somewhat satisfied.” Thirty percent of respondents said that they felt the work was “extremely challenging” and 49% indicated it was “somewhat challenging.”

Insider’s Perspective

What aspects of the job are most appealing?

Many of the respondents indicated that the time that they get to spend interacting with patients is the most appealing aspect of their job. Some mentioned that the appreciation shown to them by customers and the ability to fill their needs are particularly rewarding. One respondent commented that “working in a pharmacy in a grocery store in the community where I live is like an old-fashioned community pharmacy. I know my patients and they know me. Also it affords a great opportunity to discuss how lifestyle changes can make a difference in health.”

Other pharmacists commented that they enjoyed the flexible work hours, good salary, working with students and providing MTM and immunization services.

What aspects of the job are least appealing?

Many pharmacists made comments about how difficult it can be at times to operate under the stress of filling a large volume of prescriptions quickly. Others said that it is sometimes difficult to take breaks when there are many patients waiting for their medications. One pharmacist said that “the pace of the work place is too fast some days to give the patient the time they need.”

Keeping in mind that patients often go to the pharmacy at the end of a long day of being sick and waiting for doctor appointments, it makes sense that some pharmacists said that patients are sometimes difficult to deal with. Many pharmacists also said that it is challenging to work through billing and insurance problems.

What advice should students and practitioners consider when selecting the option of chain community pharmacy management?

Many of the respondents to this survey said that it is very important for someone considering a career in chain pharmacy to be a “people person” because of all the work that is done with the public.

One pharmacist had the following advice: “Need to be a people person and a good multitasker. Be willing to get involved in your community and with community and other healthcare organizations. Stay informed about and get engaged with state and national issues that impact pharmacy practice.”

Critical Factor Ratings

Interaction with Patients

Interaction with patients was mentioned by chain community pharmacists as one of the most satisfying aspects of these positions and this rating shows that it occupies a good portion of their time. Whether it's talking with patients or communicating with pharmacy staff or upper management, working with people is one of the core characteristics of being a community pharmacist.

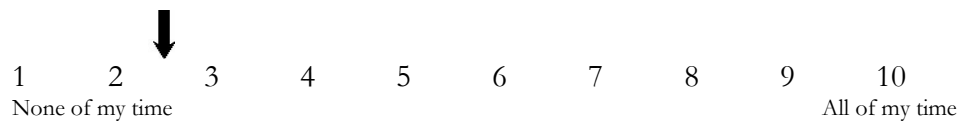
= 7.2



Conducting Physical Assessments

The level of involvement that community pharmacists have in conducting physical assessments depends on the corporate policy on clinical services and the time that they have to provide such services.

= 2.4



Interpreting Laboratory Values

There often is little opportunity to interpret laboratory values for patients. Again, this can vary depending on the specific store in a chain and whether that store is involved in special projects or has an agreement with a specialty clinic to have access to this information.

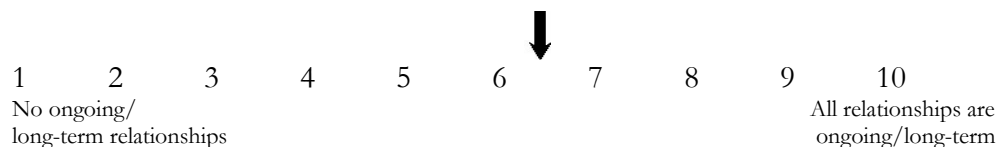
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Continuity of Relationships

In a chain community pharmacy, pharmacists have the opportunity to build relationships with the pharmacy clientele as well as their coworkers, staff, and colleagues.

= 6.4



Helping People

This factor scored mid-range on the survey with a 6.3 rating. Working with people is a large part of a chain community pharmacists. One respondent even stated "being their trusted source of information" as an appealing aspect of the job.

= 6.3



Collaboration with Other Professionals

Pharmacists have regular interaction with physicians and nurses in their community, but it typically occurs through telephone conversations and respondents indicated that it didn't take up a large part of their time.

= 3.9



Educating Other Professionals

Respondents gave educating other professionals a lower score (2.8) than the previous factor on collaborating with them. There are fewer opportunities to educate other professionals in community pharmacy because of the limited face-to-face communication with physicians and nurses. The large majority of education is for patients to help ensure their proper use and adherence with medications.

= 2.8



Variety of Daily Activities

The day-to-day activities of a pharmacist often constitute the same roster of tasks; the variation is due to the patients and staff involved. At the pharmacy level, duties consist of inventory management, dispensing, counseling, compounding, customer service, MTM services, and staff coordination.

= 4.2



Multiple Task Handling

Pharmacists are responsible for guaranteeing good customer service, the accurate dispensing of prescriptions, staff management, and general business management. A number of respondents stated this simply: every community pharmacist needs to have the "ability to multitask."

= 8.6



Problem Solving

In the chain community pharmacy setting, problem solving ranked 4.2 for respondents. This rating most likely reflects that the problems themselves do not vary greatly. Rather it is merely the individual or store involved in the issue that is different. Many cited the need to problem solve to resolve insurance issues.

= 4.2



Focus of Expertise

Pharmacists working in a community ambulatory setting do not need quite the same intensive focus as those in more specialized settings (e.g., organ transplantation in a hospital setting). Rather, these pharmacists need to have a broad body of knowledge to be able to answer any questions a patient may have.

= 3.6



Innovative Thinking

The low to mid-range response of 4.1 indicates that chain community pharmacists are involved in some innovative thinking. Opportunities for idea generating in these positions may include workflow streamlining, developing pharmacy services marketing plans, and making the business grow. Some respondents also indicated the need to be innovative with scheduling staff.

= 4.1



Applying Scientific Knowledge

Chain community pharmacists have the opportunity to exercise the scientific knowledge they gained in pharmacy school about the medications they are dispensing and in helping their patients get well.

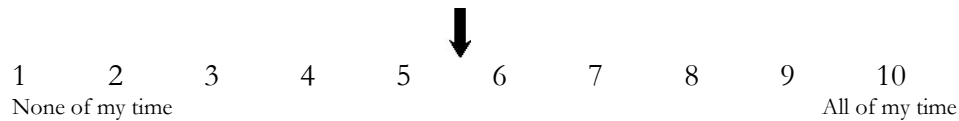
= 4.7



Applying Medical Knowledge

The score for applying medical knowledge (5.6) was slightly higher than for scientific knowledge. This makes sense considering these pharmacists are applying medical knowledge every time they check a prescription, counsel a patient, or provide a clinical service.

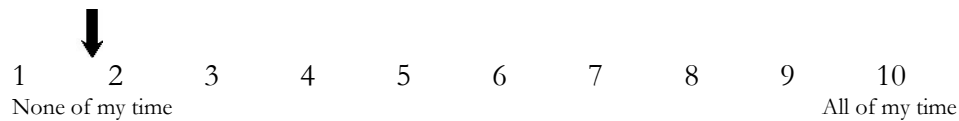
= 5.6



Creating New Knowledge by Conducting Research

Chain community pharmacy is a prime example of a setting where learned knowledge is applied rather than created. It is an arena where the results of pharmaceutical research and studies are used to improve patients' lives. There are some opportunities to conduct research in the chain community pharmacy setting, mostly in the realm of disease state management.

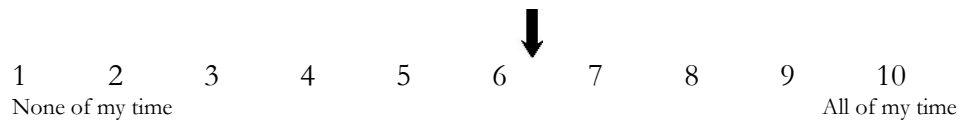
= 1.8



Management/Supervision of Others

Not surprisingly, management/supervision of others scored high for chain community pharmacists with a rating of 6.3. Besides the obvious responsibilities of pharmacy managers, staff pharmacists are also responsible for managing technicians and interns.

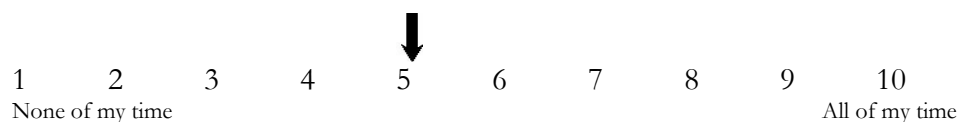
= 6.3



Management/Supervision of a Business

Although this factor is similar to supervision of others, the dynamic added here is fostering business growth and providing the pharmacy team with an understanding of the business side of pharmacy and clinical practice.

= 5.1



Pressure/Stress

Chain community pharmacists indicated that, more often than not, they experience pressure or stress on the job. Being responsible for the proper and successful running of a business that serves the public may contribute to their stress.

= 8.2



Work Schedule

The predictability of work schedule received a high score for these pharmacists, with a rating of 6.6. Although the hours may be longer in some cases, they can be anticipated.

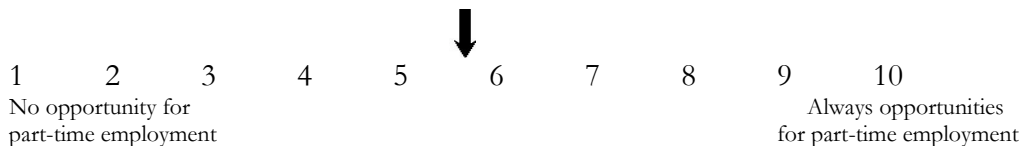
= 6.6



Part-Time Opportunities

The score for this factor has gone down since the 2007 survey. This may be due to an increasingly large workforce and thus lowering demand for pharmacist opportunities in community pharmacies

= 5.7



Job-Sharing Opportunities

Job-sharing received a low-range response for chain community pharmacists. There seems to be few opportunities for job-sharing.

= 2.5



Exit/Re-entry Opportunities

There are sometimes opportunities for exit/re-entry in the chain community pharmacy setting.

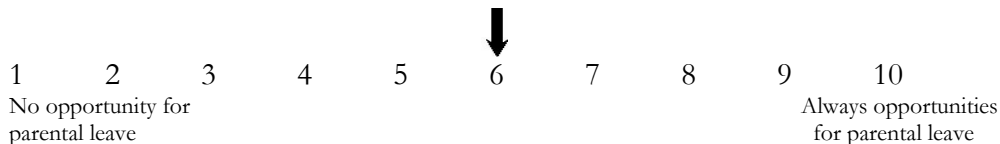
= 5.0



Parental Leave Opportunities

Parental leave opportunities ranked higher than others in the area of work-related options. Most chains provide the opportunity for parental leave.

= 6.0



Leisure/Family Time

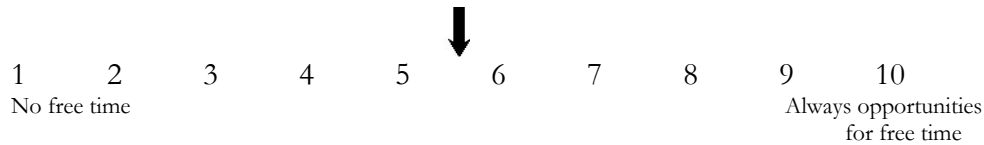
With a work schedule that is more regular and predictable, chain community pharmacists are

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able to better plan for leisure time or time with their families. However, sometimes there is a long lead time required when requesting time off.

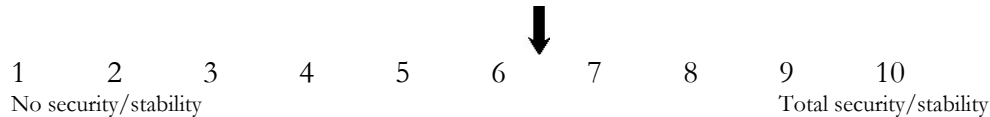
= 5.6



Job Security

All respondents to the 2012 survey still felt they had security/stability in their job.

= 6.4



Opportunities for Advancement

“Opportunities for advancement” scored mid-range with a 4.7 from respondents. These opportunities greatly depend on the size of the organization for which the pharmacist works. There will be much more opportunity to move up the ladder in a corporate chain compared with a privately owned chain with fewer stores.

= 4.7



Opportunities for Leadership Development

Leadership development is often a critical component of personal career development. Respondents indicated that there are some opportunities for leadership development in this practice setting.

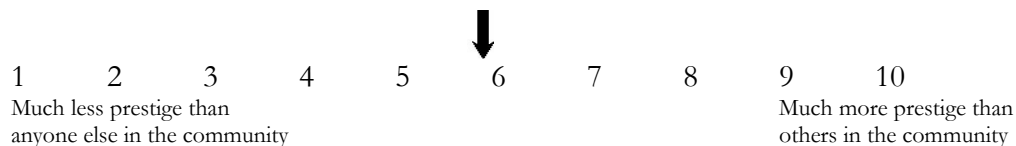
= 5.0



Community Prestige

In community prestige, chain community pharmacists scored in the mid-range at 5.8. Community pharmacists often become well known in their community for helping individuals with health care.

= 5.8



Professional Involvement

Professional involvement of individual pharmacists is critical to the development of the pharmacy profession as a whole. Pharmacists need to communicate with each other so that the profession can continue to advance in providing optimum health care for the public. In this survey, it was reported that chain community pharmacists have a mid-range response regarding the opportunity to be professionally involved in meetings and events. This differs at the local, state, and national levels and from chain to chain.

= 4.6



Income

Respondents indicated that they are slightly above the mid-range of being properly versus not properly compensated for their professional services. However, many advised those looking at career opportunities in chain community pharmacy that it is “important to consider every aspect of the position and not just the money.”

= 6.6



Benefits (vacation, health, retirement)

Chain community pharmacists gave their benefits an even higher rating than their income in the survey. Often pharmacists receive a benefits package that includes bonuses, health coverage, and retirement plans.

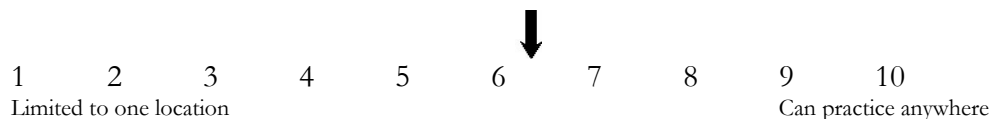
= 7.1



Geographic location

As many community pharmacy organizations have regional or national store locations, pharmacists in this area stated that there is the opportunity to relocate.

= 6.3



Working Remotely

Nearly none of the work done by community pharmacists can be done remotely.

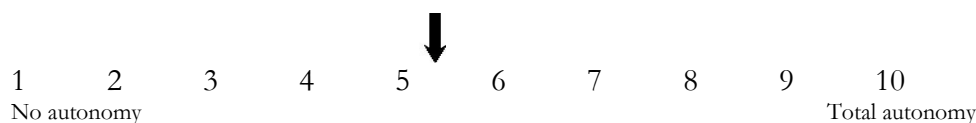
= 1.7



Autonomy

Chain community pharmacists are mid-range with autonomy. While able to make many decisions on their own while serving as the pharmacist in charge, there are often several layers of oversight at the regional and district levels.

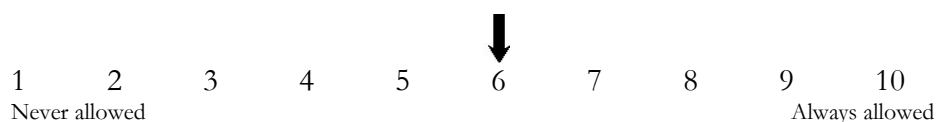
= 5.3



Self-Worth

Chain community pharmacists build a great deal of their personal self-worth through their ability to solve problems, help people, and contribute to making a business successful.

= 6.0



Future Focus

As with any business, pharmacists must always keep an eye on the future by watching for product trends, planning for increases in prescription volume, adding staff, and allowing current staff to grow and develop. However, often the task at hand of getting the prescription that a patient needs quickly and accurately takes away the focus from the future.

= 4.5



Professional Prestige

Professional prestige, to an extent, is related to the earlier rating on collaboration with other professionals. Since community pharmacists are typically limited to short telephone conversations with other health care providers, they may not be as well known professionally as perhaps a pharmacist working in a large university hospital. However, community pharmacists do develop a reputation within their communities for providing thoughtful and thorough service.

= 4.2



Unique Practice Environment

The opportunity for a unique practice environment depends greatly on the management of the particular pharmacy organization. Just by the nature of business, innovative opportunities are more frequently available in smaller, independently owned organizations rather than larger corporations because there is less red tape to negotiate for making changes to the pharmacy practice environment.

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= 2.6



Advanced Degree

In management, an advanced degree will typically be needed in the higher rungs of the corporate ladder. An MBA, for instance, may not be as necessary in a smaller company or at the store level.

= 2.4



Entrepreneurial Opportunity

Entrepreneurial opportunity varies based on the individual chain corporation. In a privately held company, some owners may offer their pharmacists a share of the business as employment incentives and other owners let their pharmacists run the pharmacy as though they owned it themselves. There are fewer entrepreneurial opportunities available in the larger, corporate chain pharmacies.

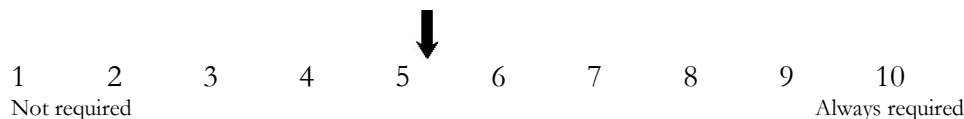
= 2.9



Additional Training

Many chain community pharmacists obtain additional training. According to this survey, 45% have completed a certificate training program.

= 5.2



Interacting With Colleagues

As one would suspect, chain community pharmacists interact with coworkers on a daily basis.

= 6.9



Travel

Chain community pharmacists for the most part have lower needs to travel for their day-to-day activities.

= 2.5

**Writing**

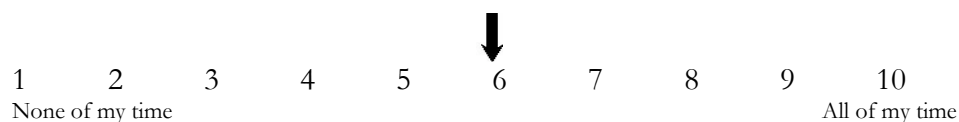
Respondents were in the low range regarding writing. While pharmacists may need to file reports, many of these are templates that require financial and personnel information to be filled in.

= 2.0

**Working With Teams**

Pharmacists in the community setting work mainly with the pharmacy staff team including other pharmacists, technicians, and interns.

= 5.9

**Mean Scores for Critical Factors**

1. Interaction with people	7.2
2. Performing physical assessments	2.4
3. Interpreting laboratory values	1.5
4. Continuity of relationships	6.4
5. Extent to which effect is direct	6.3
6. Collaboration with other professionals	3.9
7. Educating other professionals	2.8
8. Variety of daily activities	4.2
9. Multiple task handling	8.6
10. Problem solving	4.2
11. Focus of expertise	3.6
12. Innovative thinking	4.1
13. Applying scientific knowledge	4.7
14. Applying medical knowledge	5.6
15. Creating new knowledge by conducting research	1.8
16. Managing others	6.3
17. Managing business operations	5.1
18. Pressure/Stress	8.2
19. Work schedule	6.6
20. Part time opportunities	5.7
21. Job sharing	2.5
22. Exit and re-entry	5.0
23. Parental leave	6.0
24. Free time for leisure/family activities	5.6

25. Job security	6.4
26. Opportunities for advancement	4.7
27. Opportunities for leadership development	5.0
28. Community prestige	5.8
29. Professional involvement	4.6
30. Income	6.6
31. Benefits (vacation, health, retirement)	7.1
32. Geographic location	6.3
33. Working Remotely	1.7
34. Autonomy	5.3
35. Self-Worth	6.0
36. Future focus	4.5
37. Professional prestige	4.2
38. Unique practice environment	2.6
39. Advanced degree	2.2
40. Entrepreneurial opportunity	2.9
41. Additional training	5.2
42. Interacting with co-workers	6.9
43. Travel	2.5
44. Writing	2.0
45. Working with teams	5.9

Reference

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

Professional Organizations

American Pharmacists Association (APhA)
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