

Home Health Care

Background

Home health care is a practice that specializes in treating patients in their homes or other residential facilities, such as assisted living communities. Most of the prescription therapy is directed toward intravenous (IV) admixtures that are compounded by the home health care pharmacist at the direction of the physician. This type of practice also may focus on other complex therapy regimens. Because of the complexity of the medications and setups required, home health care pharmacies tend to concentrate on fewer patients than other types of pharmacies. It is typical for a home health care pharmacy to service as few as 50 to 80 patients at a time. Pharmacists working in a home health care role may partner with hospice organizations, visiting nurse teams, and social services team members.

According to the respondents in this survey, 21% of respondents' time is spent in patient care services. An additional 18% is spent dispensing medications (including the associated patient counseling). Medication management takes up an additional 15%, followed by medication preparation at 10% (including the preparation of complex parenteral prescription medications).

Characteristics

Thirty-two home health care pharmacists responded to the 2012 *APhA Career Pathway Evaluation Program* survey. Seventy percent held a PharmD degree. Twenty-four percent indicated an advanced degree (MA, MS, MBS, PhD, or other). Twenty-two percent completed a residency program, 43% completed certificate training, and 8% reported to have completed some form of other training.

The respondents' average age was 47 years old. Over two-thirds of the respondents (70%) were female. Close to half of the respondents (48%) report that they are in management positions. Annual income data indicated 21% having an income of less than \$100,000. Thirty-four percent earn between \$100,000 and \$120,000 and 44% earning over \$120,000.

The majority of respondents indicated that they were satisfied with their work, with 44% indicating they are "extremely satisfied" and 44% indicating "somewhat satisfied." Similarly, these pharmacists (38%) find their career "extremely challenging" and another 53% indicated "somewhat challenging."

Insider's Perspective

What aspects of the job are most appealing?

Many home health care pharmacists highly valued the time that they were able to spend with and the direct impact made on patients. One pharmacist said that they most enjoyed: "Helping patients at home by providing the medicine they need, so they can go home from hospitals early." Another enjoyed that they were a valued part of the care team: "We are totally involved with our patients, caregivers and prescribers. Our input is considered very

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important and appreciated.”

Other aspects of the job that were appealing to these pharmacists included the flexible work schedule and minimal weekend and holiday work.

What aspects of the job are least appealing?

Several respondents said that they didn’t particularly enjoy being on-call. Others disliked the paperwork that is required and shortages in staffing.

A few respondents reflected on the burden of insurance issues: “sometimes involved in coordinating patient's insurance problem that not related to pharmacist's clinical work.”

What advice should students and practitioners consider when selecting the option of home health care pharmacy?

One respondent recommended that “Student pharmacists need to have good basic clinical skills, dosing monitoring skills, medication monitoring experience and telecommunication skills prior to considering home health care setting.”

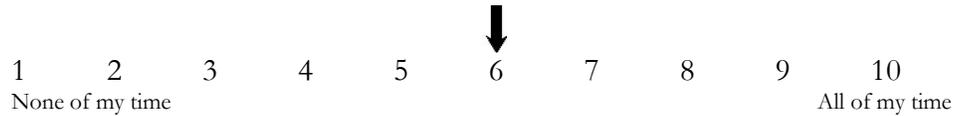
Another said that “you need to be able to work very independently, [have] VERY good time management skills, [and] need to love driving and working in your car.”

Critical Factor Ratings

Interaction with People

Interaction with patients was mentioned as one of the more satisfying aspects of home health care pharmacy, although comments from respondents indicated that this interaction was often by telephone. Whether talking with physicians, nurses, or patients, working with people is one of the core characteristics of being a home health care pharmacist.

= 6.0



Conducting Physical Assessments

While the evaluation of symptoms, laboratory reports, and other indicators can be helpful in directing the patient's therapy, in some cases physical assessment information is provided to the pharmacist versus the pharmacist conducting the assessment personally.

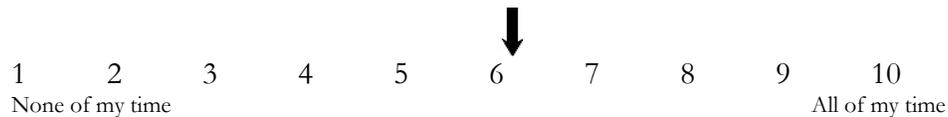
= 3.1



Interpreting Laboratory Values

Home health care pharmacy is often seen as an excellent opportunity to conduct basic preliminary health assessments of patients. Evaluation of symptoms, laboratory reports, and other indicators can be helpful in directing the patient's therapy.

= 6.2



Continuity of Relationships

Home health care pharmacists have the opportunity to get to know their patients and other community health professionals on a personal level. They develop a working knowledge of the idiosyncrasies of their patients and their IV therapies; many of these pharmacists indicated that this is key to their effectiveness in helping patients.

= 6.9



Helping People

Respondents indicated that they have a more direct versus indirect effect on the well-being of the individuals they treat. Home health care pharmacists get to know and help their patients on a personal level.

= 6.6



Collaboration with Other Professionals

Collaboration with other professionals ranked in the upper mid-range on the scale with a 6.8. Communication with physicians and nurses in home health care pharmacy is often focused on patient care and progress of the treatment. The physician, nurse, and pharmacist must work to communicate accurately and concisely to ensure the patient gets optimal therapy.

= 6.8



Educating Other Professionals

Although there is a limited amount of time devoted to educating other professionals, home health care pharmacists do take time for this activity. The rich interaction between professionals provides the opportunity for joint education.

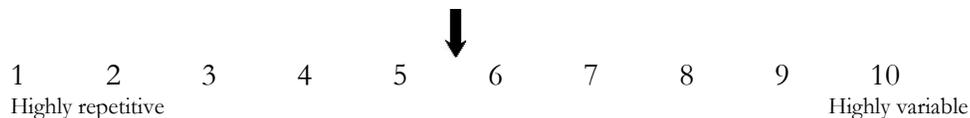
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Variety of Daily Activities

Home health care pharmacists scored mid-range in rating a variety of activities. Though they may involve themselves in repetitive tasks of preparing IV prescriptions, the amount and variety of medications and different patient needs requires a variety of skills.

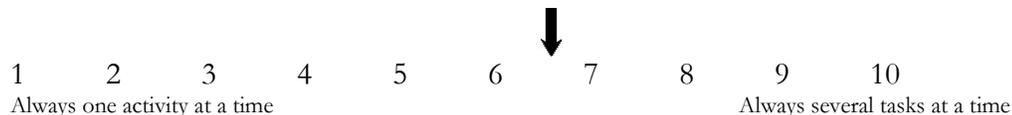
= 5.6



Multiple Task Handling

To ensure the timely and accurate dispensing of prescriptions in a home health care pharmacy, a pharmacist is often required to handle many tasks at once; among the required tasks are answering patient questions, receiving physician calls, checking filled prescription orders, and evaluating insurance problems while at the pharmacy.

= 6.6



Problem Solving

In the home health care pharmacy setting, the problems often encountered are related to IV medications. Some of the problems they encounter require novel or untested solutions while

= 2.3



Management/Supervision of Others

In home health care pharmacy, the majority of classical management or supervisory tasks are considered the responsibility of the pharmacy manager. However, home health care staff pharmacists still maintain a supervisory role because, when on duty, they are responsible for the conduct and practice in that pharmacy. This includes supervision of the technicians and any clerks in the pharmacy.

= 5.0



Management/Supervision of a Business

Respondents indicated that they spend less time on business management than on management of others. This holds true for many employee pharmacists; however, those who own their own home health care business are much more involved in business management.

= 4.1



Pressure/Stress

Home health care pharmacists indicated that they experience pressure or stress more often than not in their practice, as indicated by a rating of 7.2. Given what is known about home health care pharmacy, the level of pressure and stress relates to getting everything done in the time allotted.

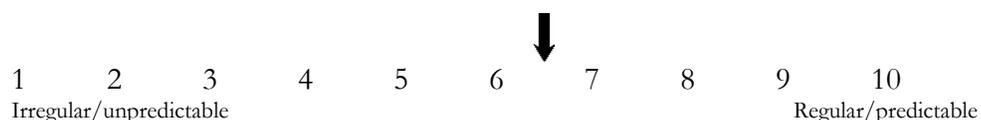
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Work Schedule

The work schedule for home health care pharmacists tends toward the predictable side as indicated by the rating of 6.5. This is one of the more appealing aspects of the practice. In some practices, pharmacists may be asked to take turns being on-call in case a patient has a need during off-hours. This is done usually on a rotation, however, and is not much of a burden.

= 6.5



Part-Time Opportunities

Receiving a mid-range rating in the survey at 4.4, pharmacists indicated that home health care pharmacy offered some opportunity for part-time employment, but not many. This offers an opportunity for those pharmacists who already work full-time, with experience in IV admixture, to pick up extra hours during their weekends or evenings.

= 4.4



Job-Sharing Opportunities

On the lower range of the scale, home health care pharmacists see some opportunities for job-sharing. However, similar to the statements for part-time work, the skills necessary for this position do not provide for a general practitioner to easily enter the field.

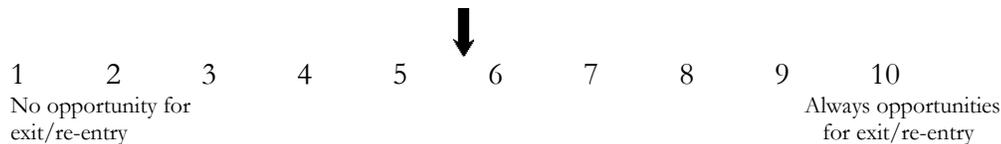
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Exit/Re-entry Opportunities

Opportunities do exist in home health care for pharmacists to leave and re-enter the field.

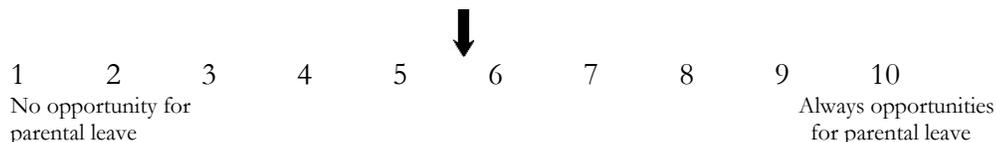
= 5.7



Parental Leave Opportunities

As with larger organizations, parental leave is one of the benefits offered to most employees. Respondents indicated that they have this opportunity.

= 5.7



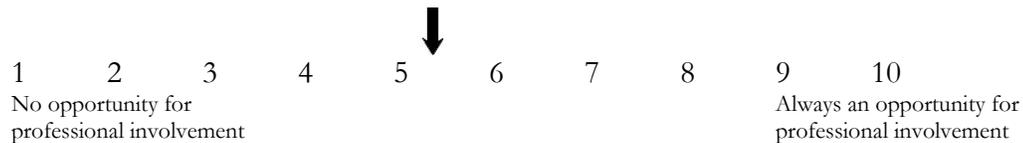
Leisure/Family Time

With a work schedule that is more regular and predictable—and overtime not excessive—home health care pharmacists are able to plan for leisure time or time with their families. However, pharmacists are sometimes required to work during holidays or weekends when other family members or friends are off from work. In addition, the concern with “on call” shifts can affect free time.

Professional Involvement

Professional involvement of individual pharmacists is critical to the development of the profession as a whole. In this survey, it was reported that home health care pharmacists have the opportunity to be involved in professional meetings and events with a rating of 5.3. Again, professional involvement is limited by the nature of practice and the motivation of the individual pharmacist.

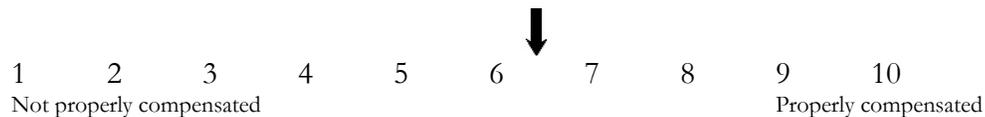
= 5.3



Income

Though income is certainly important, it often reflects other factors at work such as the national shortage of pharmacists. Home health care pharmacists ranked income at 6.4, indicating that they lean toward feeling that they are properly compensated for their work. As with other types of pharmacists, income is judged proportionate with effort.

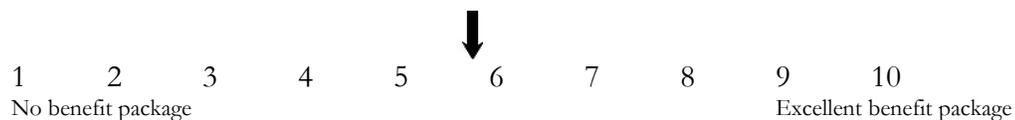
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Benefits (vacation, health, retirement)

Benefits are related to the overall compensation package. Pharmacists apparently feel that the scope and depth of benefits is adequate but not necessarily excellent.

= 5.8



Geographic location

Home health care pharmacy services are needed all over the country. Because their skill set is fairly specialized, finding a job in a given location may be easier than with other pathways.

= 7.0



Working Remotely

Not much of a home health care pharmacists work can be done remotely. Opportunities may exist to work on tasks such as documentation from a site other than the pharmacy. Additionally, making home visits may be considered working remotely by these respondents and be reflected by the score.

24. Free time for leisure/family activities	6.2
25. Job security	6.3
26. Opportunities for advancement	4.6
27. Opportunities for leadership development	5.2
28. Community prestige	5.3
29. Professional involvement	5.3
30. Income	6.4
31. Benefits (vacation, health, retirement)	5.8
32. Geographic location	7.0
33. Working Remotely	3.4
34. Autonomy	7.3
35. Self-Worth	7.5
36. Future focus	6.3
37. Professional prestige	4.8
38. Unique practice environment	7.5
39. Advanced degree	4.4
40. Entrepreneurial opportunity	4.1
41. Additional training	6.6
42. Interacting with co-workers	7.7
43. Travel	1.8
44. Writing	3.1
45. Working with teams	7.2

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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American Society for Parenteral and Enteral Nutrition (ASPEN)
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