

Independent Community Pharmacy

Background

An independent community pharmacy may be a single store with a sole proprietor or may consist of several stores owned by an individual or small group. Some independent pharmacy owners own multiple locations, making it seem like more of a regional chain. Since the stores are owned by an individual or a small private group, they are considered “independent.” In practice, small chains with four or more stores may function much more like a traditional independent pharmacy rather than a chain, if that is the objective of the owner(s).

Owning an independent pharmacy can be very rewarding. It provides the opportunity to practice pharmacy in accord with one’s personal style. Changes can be implemented quickly and pharmacists in independent community pharmacy can offer specialty services or fill a niche in the community. Yet, with opportunity come demands—particularly on time. In addition to clinical and traditional pharmacy services, independent pharmacists typically get involved to a greater extent in merchandising, marketing, and other general management functions.

Management of an independent community pharmacy is usually the duty of the owner. In some settings, the manager may be an employee pharmacist, particularly when the pharmacy consists of two or more community outlets. In some independent community pharmacies, the staff pharmacist is also the assistant manager of the pharmacy. Occasions can arise when independent community pharmacists decide to sell their store(s), such as when they feel it is time either to have someone else take over the management side of the business or upon retirement. An independent pharmacy owner may be willing to work out creative financing and will often be interested in continuing to work on at least a part-time basis.

Staff pharmacists in independent pharmacy often report to the owner(s) directly. This can create unique challenges and opportunities. Building and maintaining relationships with patients in the community is an important responsibility of pharmacists in independent community pharmacies, one that is appealing to most pharmacists in this setting. These relationships are often the foundation on which the business has been built and prospered.

The roles and responsibilities of a staff pharmacist will vary at different pharmacies. A pharmacist at one independent pharmacy may be primarily responsible for patient services while at another pharmacy the staff pharmacist may be primarily responsible for supervising technicians. A staff pharmacist in an independent community pharmacy is often in a position to bring about change and implement new services, including medication therapy management (MTM). Good communication skills and an outgoing personality are valuable traits for pharmacists interested in pursuing independent community pharmacy.

Fifty percent of the respondents’ time is spent dispensing medications, including the associated patient counseling. Business/department management requires an additional 11%, followed by medication preparation/compounding at 10%.

Characteristics

One hundred one pharmacists in independent community pharmacy responded to the 2012 *APhA Career Evaluation Pathway Program* survey. Fifty-two percent held a bachelor of pharmacy degree and 40% of respondents held a PharmD degree. Seven percent reported having an MBA. Eleven percent had been through a residency program; 59% had been through a certificate training program, and 13% reported having been through some form of other training.

Respondents' average age was 49 years old. Just over half (51%) of respondents were female. Sixty-three percent indicated some type of management role. Income data show 24% of respondents earn \$80,000–\$100,000. Forty-six percent earn less than \$100,000; 23% earn between \$100,000 and \$120,000; and 26% earn greater than \$120,000. The average time worked per week was 41 hours.

Respondents indicated that they were satisfied with their work, with 51% indicating “extremely satisfied” and 38% indicating “somewhat satisfied.” Similarly, most respondents indicated that they felt the work was quite challenging with 41% indicating “extremely challenging” and 52% indicating “somewhat challenging.”

Insider's Perspective

What aspects of the job are most appealing?

By far the most frequent response to this dealt with the ability to work with patients in a meaningful way. Independent pharmacists really feel that they are able to have an impact on their patients' health in a positive way. The main reason many independent community pharmacists initially entered the profession was to help patients. One respondent indicated enjoyment in “working with my patients, the opportunity to know them all by name and assist them with a variety of health issues.”

Another recurrent theme was the enjoyment in the autonomy of an independent pharmacy environment and the variety in daily activities. One pharmacist said they enjoyed “the opportunity to solve new problems every day.”

What aspects of the job are least appealing?

Insurance and billing issues were common concerns for these pharmacists. Comments included: “working with insurance companies to get prior authorizations approved” and “dealing with the insurance company or PBM and making sure we are getting paid enough to at least cover the cost of the drugs.”

While many pharmacists said that they really liked the variety of daily activities this also comes with a negative of balancing competing responsibilities. One pharmacist said that they struggled with “trying to manage my time between pharmacy operations and managerial duties of the business.”

Others reported problems with the physical demands of a full time community practice career. Pharmacists in this setting often are on their feet for the entire shift which could be very long. This is not unique to independent pharmacies and is also a concern for chain community pharmacists.

What advice should students and practitioners consider when selecting a management position in independent community pharmacy?

Overall, most indicated the need to have good communication skills and a strong desire to help others. This cannot be overemphasized considering the fact that community pharmacists are generally the most accessible health professional. This is especially true in rural communities where patients are not bashful about calling their pharmacist at home for much-needed advice or to have a prescription filled.

Others commented on the importance of learning sound business skills, which aren't always emphasized during pharmacy school. Included in this area are marketing skills, personnel management, etc.

One pharmacist gave the following advice: "Working for a small business often means the buck stops with you. Be invested in the business, be prepared to make decisions and judgment calls, and defend them."

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Collaboration with Other Professionals

Independent pharmacists have good relationships with other health professionals in their communities. Pharmacists have an important role in maintaining open communication with other health care providers regarding the drug therapy of patients and in bringing drug therapy problems to the attention of the appropriate prescriber.

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Educating Other Professionals

Educating other health care professionals is an important role of the pharmacist, although in community practice not as much time is devoted to it compared with educating patients. One of the most common educational activities enjoyed by pharmacists in the independent community setting is precepting student pharmacists.

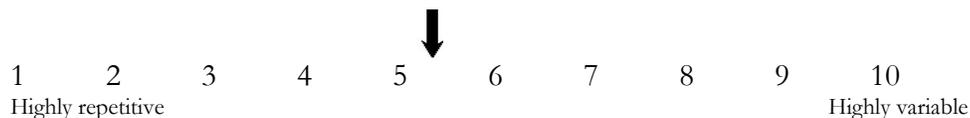
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Variety of Daily Activities

Pharmacists in independent community pharmacies were mid-range in characterizing their daily activities. Owning, managing, or staffing an independent community pharmacy involves a great number of activities outside the dispensing process and even outside the pharmacy department.

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Multiple Task Handling

Pharmacists in the community setting are often required to handle multiple tasks at once. This could include answering patient questions, receiving new prescriptions by telephone, checking filled prescription orders, evaluating insurance problems, or other administrative duties. Pharmacists working in the community environment must be able to prioritize effectively and work efficiently to minimize the stress of these multiple demands for time and attention.

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Creating New Knowledge by Conducting Research

An independent community pharmacy is a site where pharmacy is practiced and few pharmacists are involved in conducting research. Pharmacists have been known to refer to investigating the literature and textbooks in search of answers to questions or drug therapy problems as “research,” which may account for the low-range of responses to this question. However, more and more independent pharmacies are getting involved in research through organizations such as APhA and NCPA.

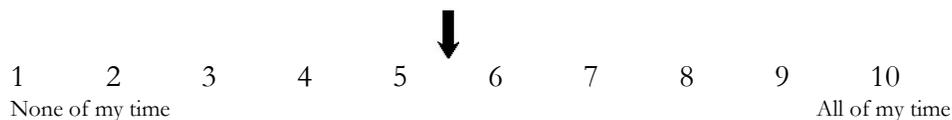
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Management/Supervision of Others

Both managers and staff pharmacists oversee the staff they work with in independent pharmacy. Many times the pharmacist who is scheduled for the day takes responsibility for the management of the staff and administrative functions that need to be completed.

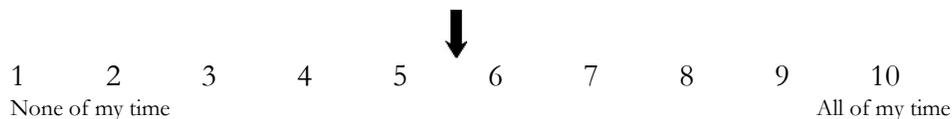
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Management/Supervision of a Business

Much of the time spent on managing the business will occur before the opening of the pharmacy and after closing.

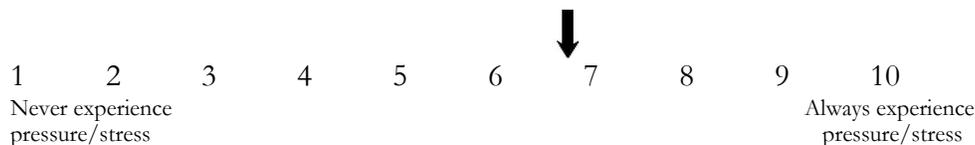
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Pressure/Stress

Respondents placed pressure/stress in the upper mid-range of the rating. Interactions with patients, who at times may become impatient, handling multiple tasks at once, and an ever-increasing prescription volume all contribute to this rating. Working in front of an “audience” of pharmacy patrons also contributes to a stressful work environment.

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Work Schedule

An advantage to the independent community workplace is a regular and predictable schedule. Regular hours of operation provide for a structured schedule. This gives pharmacists the opportunity to plan their lives a little further in advance than if their schedule were less predictable.

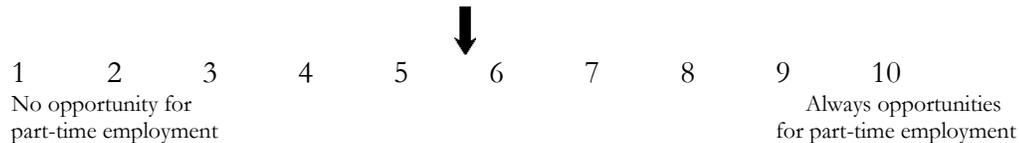
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Part-Time Opportunities

Respondents were split on the extent to which the independent community environment presents opportunities for part-time employment as seen by the large standard deviation for this factor. Differences in prescription volume, staffing, and hours of operation contribute to the variability. Some independent community pharmacies will seek relief pharmacists only to take a day off or for a scheduled vacation.

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Job-Sharing Opportunities

Independent community pharmacists indicated a low end response to job-sharing at a rating of 3.5.

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Exit/Re-entry Opportunities

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

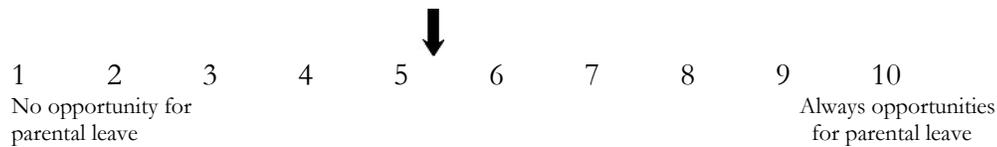
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Parental Leave Opportunities

As independent pharmacies are relatively small organizations, parental leave is a benefit that is offered on a limited basis at some stores that have the capability to “fill in” with other staff. Many try to provide some type of benefit in this area.

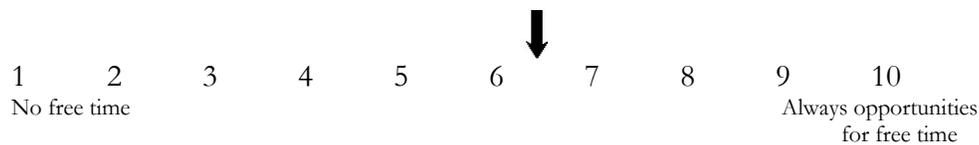
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Leisure/Family Time

Even with the demanding schedule of independent community pharmacy, respondents indicated that they do have some leisure/family time. However, if one is both the pharmacy owner and manager, time can be more difficult to come by unless the practice is well established. Independent pharmacy owners have the ability to set their own schedule, but must factor in the cost of creating free time for outside activities and any additional staffing needs when they are gone.

= 6.4



Job Security

The job security in independent community pharmacy is highly dependent on the success of the business. Not surprisingly, independent community pharmacists ranked job security in the moderately high range with a 7.0 rating.

= 7.0



Opportunities for Advancement

Independent community pharmacists had mixed opinions on opportunities for advancement. There is wide variance which may relate to the pharmacists' position; owners/managers have no upper movement since they are already in the top position, whereas staff pharmacists do have the opportunity to move up. In some cases, partnerships are formed whereas in other situations, an owner looking to retire may step aside as owner/manager and advance someone to the manager position. The relative success of the business also could be viewed as a measure of advancement.

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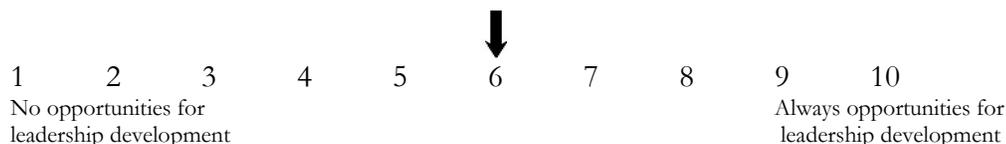


Opportunities for Leadership Development

On-the-job experience provides significant opportunity for the development of leadership skills for pharmacists in independent community pharmacy. These pharmacists must make decisions and provide direction to support staff throughout the day. The ability to gain the support, cooperation, and loyalty of coworkers or employees is important to the success of

the business.

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Community Prestige

Pharmacists are highly visible, well-respected, and trusted individuals in the community. There was strong agreement among respondents that they enjoy more prestige than others in the community.

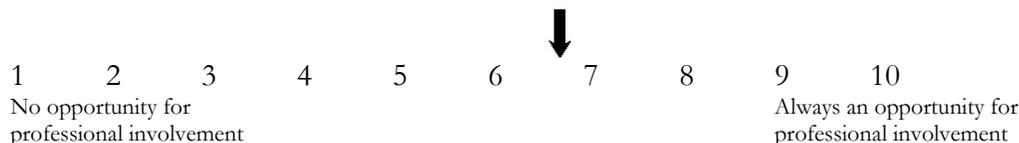
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Professional Involvement

Active involvement in pharmacy meetings and events creates opportunities for professional development and the sharing of ideas and knowledge among peers. The extent to which a pharmacist gets involved is largely a personal decision. Respondents agreed there is ample opportunity to get involved.

= 6.7



Income

There is a significant risk-reward opportunity in independent pharmacy, especially ownership. The more successful you are in business the greater the income; but if you are unable to compete effectively with the competition there is a great deal to be lost if the business fails. Respondents tended toward the upper mid-range of the scale of being properly compensated for their work.

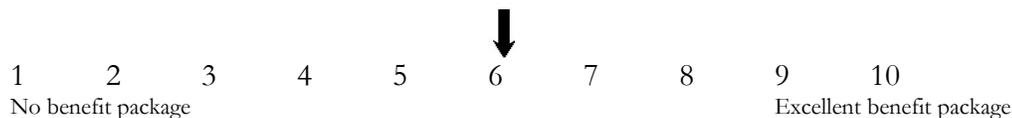
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Benefits (vacation, health, retirement)

Benefits often go hand-in-hand with an overall employment package. Independent community pharmacists ranked the benefits package at 6.1.

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Geographic Location

There is limited mobility because once the practice is established it is difficult to move in independent community pharmacy.

= 3.9



Working Remotely

Unsurprisingly, there are little opportunities for independent community pharmacists to work remotely. This makes sense since most of their work is in the pharmacy dispensing and counseling patients.

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Autonomy

Independent community pharmacists enjoy a great deal of freedom in making decisions and implementing change to meet their personal goals and objectives. Autonomy is synonymous with independence.

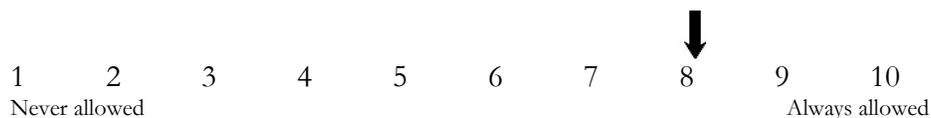
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Self-Worth

Ranked the second-highest factor in this profile, respondents indicated that their practice provides many opportunities to create personal value and positive outcomes through decision making and accomplishments.

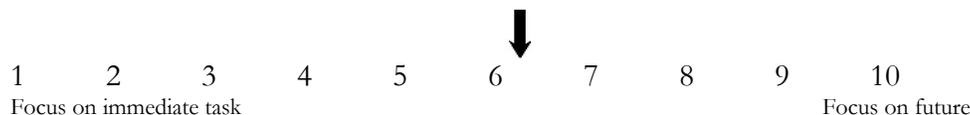
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Future Focus

A community pharmacy is as much a business as it is a health care facility. The pharmacists must be focused on trends in the industry and be proactive to remain competitive. These pharmacists generally agreed that their practice allows them to focus on the future.

= 6.2



Mean Scores for Critical Factors

1. Interaction with people	7.2
2. Performing physical assessments	3.0
3. Interpreting laboratory values	2.4
4. Continuity of relationships	8.4
5. Extent to which effect is direct	7.0
6. Collaboration with other professionals	5.0
7. Educating other professionals	3.4
8. Variety of daily activities	5.3
9. Multiple task handling	7.4
10. Problem solving	5.0
11. Focus of expertise	4.5
12. Innovative thinking	6.1
13. Applying scientific knowledge	6.0
14. Applying medical knowledge	6.8
15. Creating new knowledge by conducting research	2.6
16. Managing others	5.5
17. Managing business operations	5.5
18. Pressure/Stress	6.8
19. Work schedule	6.9
20. Part time opportunities	5.7
21. Job sharing	3.5
22. Exit and re-entry	5.1
23. Parental leave	5.3
24. Free time for leisure/family activities	6.4
25. Job security	7.0
26. Opportunities for advancement	4.8
27. Opportunities for leadership development	6.0
28. Community prestige	7.7
29. Professional involvement	6.7
30. Income	6.9
31. Benefits (vacation, health, retirement)	6.1
32. Geographic location	3.9
33. Working Remotely	2.3
34. Autonomy	7.6
35. Self-Worth	8.1
36. Future focus	6.2
37. Professional prestige	7.0
38. Unique practice environment	6.0
39. Advanced degree	3.2
40. Entrepreneurial opportunity	6.9
41. Additional training	5.9
42. Interacting with co-workers	7.7
43. Travel	2.3
44. Writing	2.5
45. Working with teams	4.9

Reference

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

Professional Organizations

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