

Ambulatory Care Pharmacy

Background

Ambulatory care pharmacy is a fairly new focus for pharmacists. In June 2007, the Board of Pharmacy Specialties (BPS) received the *Report of the Role Delineation Study of Ambulatory Care Pharmacists*, which delineated five domains of practice including: Direct Patient Care, Practice Management, Public Health, Medical Informatics and Professional Development, and Patient Advocacy. BPS now offers the opportunity for pharmacists to become certified in this field. The BPS website provides the following description of ambulatory care pharmacy:

Ambulatory care pharmacy practice is the provision of integrated, accessible health care services by pharmacists who are accountable for addressing medication needs, developing sustained partnerships with patients, and practicing in the context of family and community. This is accomplished through direct patient care and medication management for ambulatory patients, long-term relationships, coordination of care, patient advocacy, wellness and health promotion, triage and referral, and patient education and self-management. The ambulatory care pharmacists may work in both an institutional and community-based clinic involved in direct care of a diverse patient population.

Ambulatory care pharmacists work in a variety of environments in both hospital and community-based settings. Each site has its own unique practice style and may focus on primary care or focus on one specific disease state.

Characteristics

Eighty-three ambulatory care pharmacists responded to the 2012 *APhA Career Pathway Evaluation Program* survey. Twenty-three percent of respondents held an entry-level pharmacy degree; 79% held the PharmD degree. Eleven percent indicated that they also had a non-pharmacy bachelor's degree and 10% indicated an advanced degree (MA, MS, MBS, PhD, or other).

Fifty-six percent had been through a residency program, 48% had been through a certificate-training program, 32% held a BPS certification, and 3% reported having been through some form of other training.

Respondents' average age was 40 years old. Seventy-nine percent of respondents were female. Income data show 4% earn between \$80,000–\$100,000, while 85% earn \$100,000 or more per year, with 4% earning greater than \$150,000. The average time worked per week was 41 hours.

An overwhelming majority of respondents indicated that they were satisfied with their job, with 57% indicating “extremely satisfied” and 32% indicating “somewhat satisfied.” Similarly, most respondents indicated that they felt the job was challenging, with 46%

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indicating “extremely challenging” and 51% indicating “somewhat challenging.”

Insider’s Perspective

What aspects of the job are most appealing?

Direct patient care/patient interactions were listed by 42% of respondents as the most appealing aspects of their role. Twenty-nine percent of the respondents listed the interaction with physicians, nurses, and other professional staff as also being an appealing aspect of their role. One respondent indicated enjoyment from “working directly with patients to improve care.” Another respondent indicated “working closely with doctors, nurses, [and] patients in a team effort to care for patients” was an appealing aspect of the role.

What is true for one ambulatory care practice is not necessarily true for other practices as the practice settings and disease states covered differ. Some respondents work within the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) system while others indicated practice sites such as a university hospital or a group practice. Disease states that are treated vary greatly from oncology to immunization clinics to diabetes clinics and others.

With respect to the aforementioned information on direct patient care and interaction with other health care providers, it makes sense that applying medical knowledge was the highest-rated critical factor.

One respondent summed up what many indicated by noting enjoyment from the “patient, clinician, and professional staff interactions and the ability to make independent clinical decisions on medication therapy.” Another respondent indicated enjoying “the ability to work closely with both patients and providers in providing patient-centered care.”

One respondent was very encouraging and stated that the best part of the position was “direct patient care, managing therapy, working at the top of my license.”

What aspects of the job are least appealing?

Documentation/paperwork were cited by 21% of pharmacists as one of the least appealing aspects of their roles. In addition, heavy workload was cited by 10% of the respondents. A respondent mentioned, “Administrative aspects take away from patient care activities. Documentation to demonstrate value.” Another respondent voiced concern about volume as the clinic has a “large patient volume (for the number of) clinical pharmacist [full-time equivalent] FTEs to care for patients.”

One respondent put an interesting perspective on the least appealing aspect stating, “Ambulatory care is a newer specialty and it is sometimes difficult to convince other providers that you are complementing their work, not trying to do their job.”

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

Fifteen percent of the respondents commented that they encourage students to gain experience prior to seeking a role in this field, either in the hospital setting or through a

residency. In addition, a few focused on the aspects of being self-motivated in lifelong learning. Because this is a newer area, one respondent stated that a student would “have to prove yourself [to providers] but there is also a lot of opportunity for development.”

One respondent provided some important advice that students “must be comfortable directly interacting with medical providers and confident enough in your clinical abilities to perform the daily tasks, which are very rewarding to both you and your patients. Must enjoy talking with patients and working as a member of a multidisciplinary team.”

Critical Factor Ratings

Interaction With Patients

Ambulatory care pharmacists leaned toward the higher end of the spectrum with a 7.5 indicating that they spend a significant amount of time interacting with patients. One respondent expressed enjoyment from “relationships built with patients.”

= 7.5



Conducting Physical Assessments

Responses varied among pharmacists because this factor was dependent on the environment in which they work. For the most part, ambulatory care pharmacists do not conduct many physical assessments.

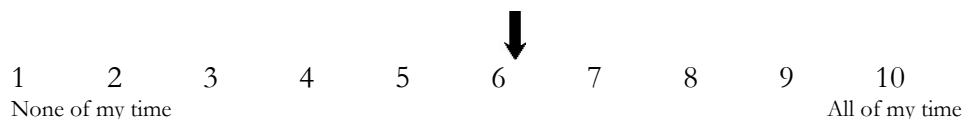
= 4.1



Interpreting Laboratory Values

As noted earlier, some ambulatory care pharmacists work in hospitals that provide them access to patient medical charts. When available, these pharmacists take advantage of this access a little over half the time. One respondent indicated having “time to invest in reviewing patient histories to ensure [patients] are appropriately managed.”

= 6.1



Continuity of Relationships

Ambulatory care pharmacists have ongoing/long-term relationships with a number of patients. This factor depends on the type of clinical therapeutic area. A respondent stated, “love the continuity of care and working as a member of an integrated health care team.”

= 7.4



Helping People

Based on the amount of patient interaction and continuity of relationships, ambulatory care pharmacists rated helping people in the 7.4 range.

= 7.4



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Collaboration With Other Professionals

These professionals have opportunities to interact with other professionals on a regular basis. One respondent summed this up by indicating that one of the more personally appealing aspects was “collaboration with RN, MD, MA, Social Work, a multidisciplinary team to take care of [patients].” Another respondent stated the positives of “working as part of the health care team, side by side with providers.”

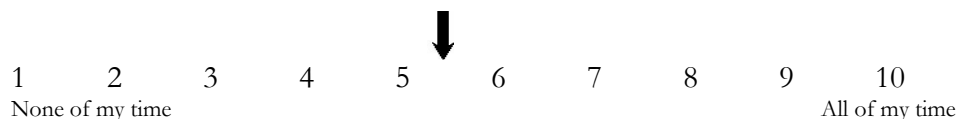
= 7.0



Educating Other Professionals

Although ambulatory care pharmacists interact with other professionals, they indicated a mid-range score of 5.4 related to educating other professionals. Some respondents highlighted that they have the opportunity to educate student pharmacists and residents.

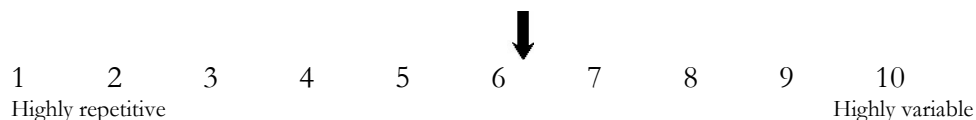
= 5.4



Variety of Daily Activities

The variety of daily activities varies within the practice. Those who practice in a specific disease state area (e.g., oncology, surgical units) have less variety than those who may be able to work in a different clinical area (e.g., primary practice) depending on the rotation schedule and clinic schedule.

= 6.2



Multiple Task Handling

Ambulatory care pharmacists are in the high mid-range regarding multiple task handling. Because most pharmacists multitask on a regular basis, this factor was not seen as something distinctive to this group.

= 7.0



Problem Solving

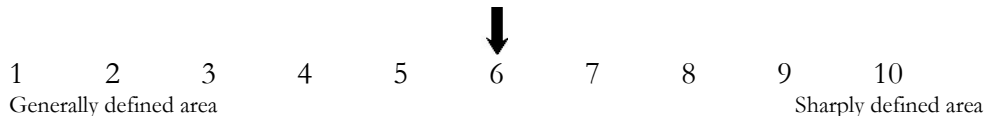
Most respondents indicated that they follow evidenced-based protocols in solving problems regarding patient medication choices and complex medication regimens.

= 5.1

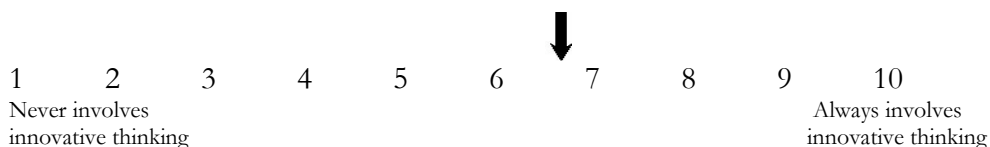


Focus of Expertise

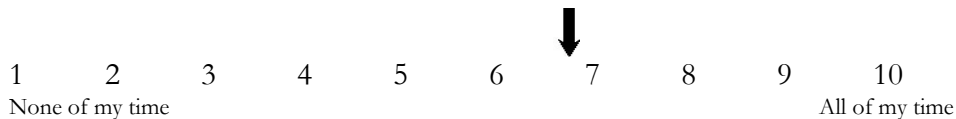
Ambulatory care pharmacists indicated a mid-range of 6.0 regarding the focus of expertise. Although this is a BPS-certified specialty, respondents indicated this factor depended on the specific area of practice as noted in earlier critical factors.

= 6.0**Innovative Thinking**

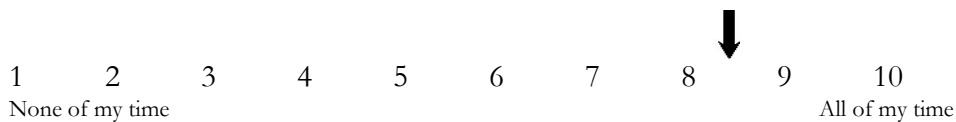
These practitioners enjoy a slightly higher mid-range application of innovative thinking. One respondent indicated that “working with others in an interdisciplinary team provides opportunities to be innovative.”

= 6.7**Applying Scientific Knowledge**

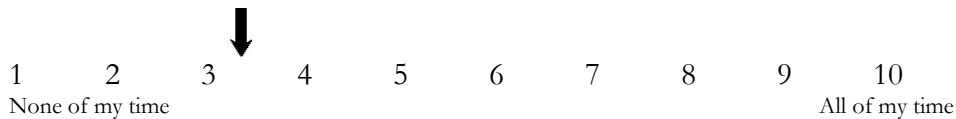
Ambulatory care pharmacists indicated that they apply scientific knowledge in their role.

= 6.8**Applying Medical Knowledge**

Rated as the highest critical factor, ambulatory care pharmacists indicated that they apply medical knowledge to a great extent. This rating can be related to the interdisciplinary teams and being able to provide advice and consultation regarding individual patient care.

= 8.4**Creating New Knowledge by Conducting Research**

As stated earlier, ambulatory care pharmacists tend to follow protocols and evidenced-based practice algorithms. In general, they are not looking to create new knowledge in the field.

= 3.3

Management/Supervision of Others

As with many profiles, pharmacists in all areas have some oversight of other individuals. Ambulatory care pharmacists indicated a mid-range score of 4.5.

= 4.5



Management/Supervision of a Business

For the most part, these practitioners spend little time in managing the business. However, many indicated that they need to understand the business to function at a high level within the team.

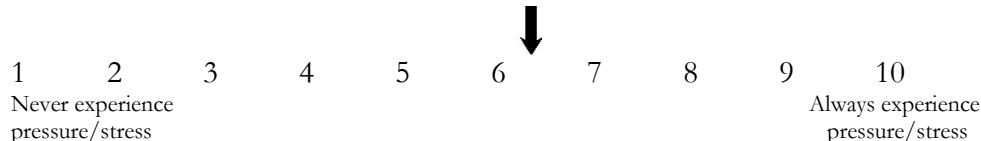
= 3.5



Pressure/Stress

Ambulatory care pharmacists are mid-range at 6.3 regarding pressure/stress. One respondent stated that lower stress is based on the fact that “very little in ambulatory care is ‘urgent.’” However, another respondent felt the opposite and indicated feeling “strain from overwhelmed providers referring patients.”

= 6.3



Work Schedule

Most respondents indicated that their work schedule was predictable. Many indicated that they work Monday through Friday and rarely work on weekends.

= 7.5



Part-Time Opportunities

There are some part-time opportunities for ambulatory care pharmacists. Considering that this specialty is still a relatively new area, these opportunities may be limited.

= 5.2



Job-Sharing Opportunities

Even less opportunity exists for job sharing. This factor was one of the lowest-scored critical factors for the group.

= 3.2



Exit/Re-entry Opportunities

Ambulatory care pharmacists felt that there were some opportunities to exit and then re-enter the field. This response may be based on the lower opportunities for part-time and job sharing, whereby once someone is trying to re-enter they would need to look at full-time opportunities.

= 4.8



Parental Leave Opportunities

Respondents indicated that they are on the high mid-range regarding parental leave opportunities with a score of 7.2.

= 7.2



Leisure/Family Time

Ambulatory care pharmacists felt that they have time for leisure and family.

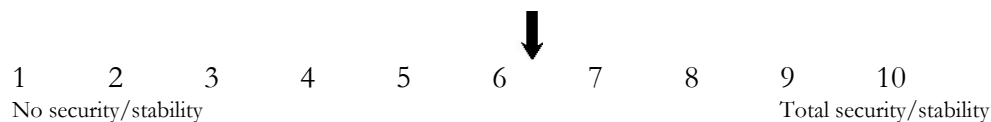
= 7.0



Job Security

Practitioners indicated a mid-range score of 6.3 regarding job security. Because this is a newer area of practice, there are still times when ambulatory care pharmacists need to provide documentation of the value they provide.

= 6.3



Opportunities for Advancement

Opportunities for advancement ratings by the respondents were in the low mid-range. As a newer area of practice, advancement opportunities are currently limited; however, some respondents felt that they see this changing.

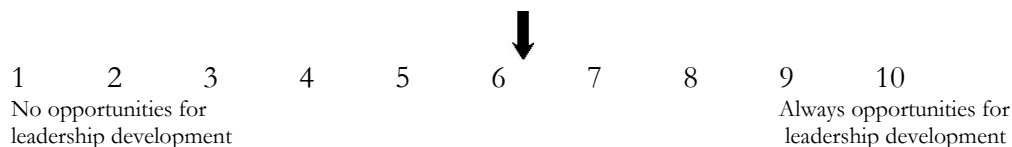
=4.9



Opportunities for Leadership Development

Ambulatory care pharmacists indicated that they were mid-range regarding leadership development opportunities.

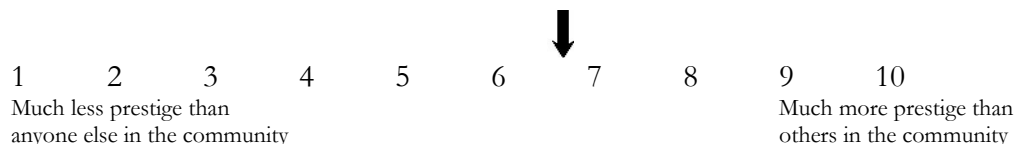
= 6.2



Community Prestige

Respondents' ratings were similar to many other profiles regarding community prestige. The respondents indicated they felt a little more prestige than others.

= 6.8



Professional Involvement

Many respondents indicated that the opportunity for professional involvement was available but not everyone takes advantage of it. One respondent stated, "ambulatory care allows for committee involvement (both internally and externally)."

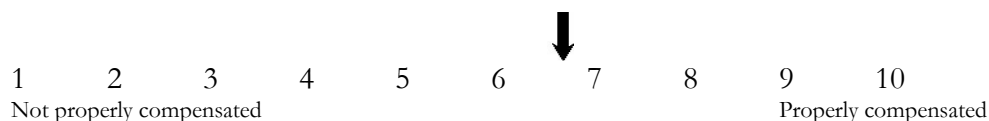
= 6.8



Income

Respondents indicated that they are mid-range in feeling properly compensated. Thirty-eight percent of the respondents indicated their income between \$100,000–\$119,999.

= 6.7



Benefits (vacation, health, retirement)

Ambulatory care pharmacists rated this critical factor as one of the top five factors. Many of the respondents take advantage of their employers' benefit packages.

= 7.9



Geographic Location

Being a newer area of practice, there are some limited geographic opportunities. As the practice area continues to expand, this rating will change.

= 4.7



Working Remotely

This was one of the lowest-rated critical factors. It is rare for ambulatory care pharmacists to work remotely because they are an integral part of direct patient-centered care.

= 3.1



Autonomy

Many of the respondents felt that they have a good range of autonomy. One respondent reported having "some autonomy through collaborative agreements." Another stated having "autonomy because (where I work) I have freedom to prescribe, create my own treatment plan."

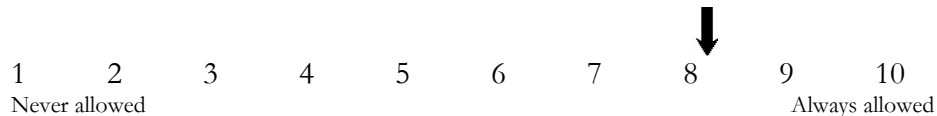
= 7.3



Self-Worth

Self-worth is one of the five highest-rated critical factors for this group. This rating correlates well to the autonomy that some indicated.

= 8.1



= 7.6



Interacting With Colleagues

Respondents indicated interacting with colleagues as one of the top five areas for ambulatory care pharmacists. Many reinforce the ideals of interdisciplinary teams and interacting with prescribers and residents.

= 7.9



Travel

Travel was the lowest-rated critical factor. Ambulatory care pharmacists rarely travel for their role.

= 2.1



Writing

Ambulatory care pharmacists spend little time writing other than the documentation notes for patients or for billing purposes.

= 3.3



Working With Teams

Because much of their time is spent in interdisciplinary groups, these practitioners rated working with teams as a 6.7.

= 6.7



Mean Scores for Critical Factors

1. Interaction With Patients	7.5
2. Conducting Physical Assessments	4.1
3. Interpreting Laboratory Values	6.1
4. Continuity of Relationships	7.4
5. Helping People	7.4
6. Collaboration With Other Professionals	7.0
7. Educating Other Professionals	5.4
8. Variety of Daily Activities	6.2
9. Multiple Task Handling	7.0
10. Problem Solving	5.1
11. Focus of Expertise	6.0
12. Innovative Thinking	6.7
13. Applying Scientific Knowledge	6.8
14. Applying Medical Knowledge	8.4
15. Creating New Knowledge by Conducting Research	3.3
16. Management/Supervision of Others	4.5
17. Management/Supervision of a Business	3.5
18. Pressure/Stress	6.3
19. Work Schedule	7.5
20. Part-Time Opportunities	5.2
21. Job-Sharing Opportunities	3.2
22. Exit and Re-entry Opportunities	4.8
23. Parental Leave Opportunities	7.2
24. Leisure/Family Time	7.0
25. Job Security	6.3
26. Opportunities for Advancement	4.9
27. Opportunities for Leadership Development	6.2
28. Community Prestige	6.8
29. Professional Involvement	6.8
30. Income	6.7
31. Benefits (vacation, health, retirement)	7.9
32. Geographic Location	4.7
33. Working Remotely	3.1
34. Autonomy	7.3
35. Self-Worth	8.1
36. Future Focus	6.7
37. Professional Prestige	6.1
38. Unique Practice Environment	8.1
39. Advanced Degree	4.1
40. Entrepreneurial Opportunity	3.8
41. Additional Training	7.6
42. Interacting With Colleagues	7.9
43. Travel	2.1
44. Writing	3.3
45. Working With Teams	6.7

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Professional Organizations

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