

Health System Pharmacy: Inpatient

Background

The inpatient setting of health system pharmacy is unique in a number of ways. The patients treated by a health system pharmacist typically have more complicated conditions than those in an ambulatory setting and take multiple medications. A staff pharmacist may have exposure to oncology, intravenous (IV) medication therapy, neonatal care, nutrition, pain therapy, geriatrics, and much more. Staff pharmacists face a varied set of responsibilities including dispensing medication, making purchasing decisions, monitoring drug therapy, preparing IV medication, and overseeing drug administration.

The location and layout of the pharmacy can vary greatly among health systems. Some are centralized, with all of the pharmacy staff and equipment located in a single area of the hospital, usually on one of the lower floors. Another format is the decentralized pharmacy, where there is a main pharmacy in a central location but there are also “mini-pharmacies,” called satellites, located throughout the health system at key patient care units. The type of the pharmacy depends on the size, needs, resources, and focus of the health system.

Health system pharmacists interact with nurses and physicians in their positions. Often, they do not work directly with the patient, but rather with the other health care providers to optimize the patient’s therapy. In some health systems, however, there are opportunities for pharmacists to see patients by rounding with physicians and nurses or by providing discharge counseling.

Twenty four percent of a health system inpatient pharmacist’s time is spent on medication dispensing and associated patient counseling. Eighteen percent of their time is spent on medication management services and another 14% is spent patient management services.

Characteristics

One hundred thirty-nine health system staff pharmacists responded to the 2012 *APhA Career Pathway Evaluation Program* survey. Seventy percent of respondents indicated having a PharmD degree. Twenty-three percent of respondents earned an advanced degree such as an MA, MS, or MBA. Twenty-four percent had been through a residency, and 26% indicated they had been through certificate training. Twenty percent of respondents indicated that they had obtained BPS certification.

The respondents’ average age was 45 years old. Well over half of the respondents (65%) were female. Annual income data show 25% reporting an income between less than \$100,000, 37% earning between \$100,000 - \$120,000, and 34% earning over \$120,000.

The majority of respondents indicated that they were satisfied with their job with 44% indicating “extremely satisfied” and 46% indicating “somewhat satisfied.” Respondents felt the job was challenging with 36% indicating “extremely challenging” and 53% indicating

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“somewhat challenging.”

Insider’s Perspective

What aspects of the job are most appealing?

Respondents seemed to emphasize that they really liked the interaction that they have with their pharmacist and interdisciplinary colleagues. Pharmacists also felt that they were able to positively influence patient care and health system policy in their position within the inpatient pharmacy. One pharmacist articulated his feelings in this way: “There are opportunities to influence medication use at both the organizational level; and at the individual patient level through collaborative direct patient care.”

Many other respondents indicated that they enjoyed the flexibility and variety of their daily work. One respondent said that she enjoyed “the variety of the work and the opportunity to expand my scope of practice and always look for new challenges.”

What aspects of the job are least appealing?

Many of the respondents indicated that workload and long hours were the least appealing aspect of their work. Others were concerned with the management and administration, workflow issues, and medication shortages.

One respondent summed up many concerns about the bureaucracy within a large health system by expressing that the least appealing aspect is “the centralized top-down organizational decision making structure with limited opportunities for non-managers to participate more actively in departmental decision-making.”

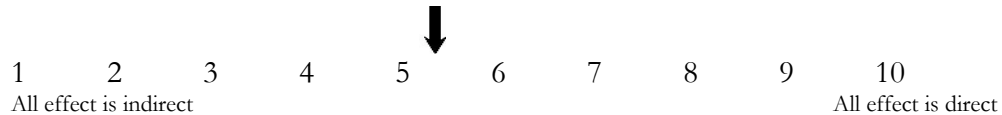
What advice should students and practitioners consider when selecting the option of health system staff pharmacy?

Many pharmacists recommended that residency training should be completed before pursuing a career in an inpatient setting. Other skills that were considered critical included the ability to problem solve, being open to lifelong learning, and being open to varying opportunities.

Helping People

In answer to the question “To what degree is your effect on the well-being of individuals indirect versus direct?” health system staff pharmacists rated the factor mid-range at 5.3. In reviewing complex therapies and collaborating with other health care providers in the health system, pharmacists can have a very direct effect on helping people. However, other work in the pharmacy, such as dispensing and IV medication preparation, has more indirect impact on people.

= 5.3



Collaboration with Other Professionals

To the same degree that community pharmacists deal with the public and their patients, health system pharmacists work with other health care professionals. In the health system setting, there is the opportunity to interact with any number of specialty caregivers in obstetrics, nutrition, oncology, transplant, surgery, infectious disease, or other specialty areas. Health system pharmacists are exposed to wide array clinical opportunities.

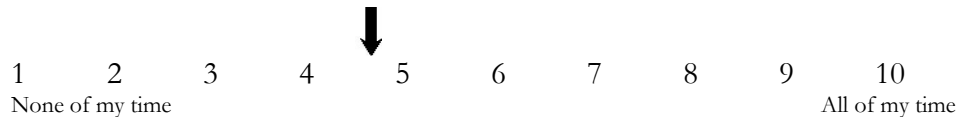
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Educating Other Professionals

By regularly interacting with other health care providers, health system inpatient pharmacists have the opportunity to educate those professionals. Health systems are a very intensive care environment and those who work there are always looking to expand their knowledge base to remain current with up-to-date information and provide the best care for their patients.

= 4.7



Variety of Daily Activities

Health system staff pharmacists indicate that their daily activities are split between those that are repetitive and those that are variable. Part of this may be attributed to the wider variety of medications that health system pharmacies handle. Besides oral medications, health system pharmacists handle chemotherapy, injectable medications, nutrition therapies, hydration therapy, and others that may have a different protocol to follow.

= 5.2



Multiple Task Handling

With a large variety of medications and patients needing a high degree of attention and care, health system staff pharmacists are charged with making sure those medications are delivered on time and accurately, and that those medications are optimal for patients. At the same time, staff pharmacists are required to answer phones and work with other professionals assisting them with patient care.

= 7.1



Problem Solving

Health system staff pharmacists report that when faced with a problem in their practice, they are mid-range in the way they arrive at a solution. With more complicated patients, therapies sometimes will be chosen that require new approaches. And, each patient may respond differently to any given therapy, so adjustments must be made. However, many past experiences can be called upon to solve other problems.

= 4.6



Focus of Expertise

Inpatient pharmacists maintain a relatively general knowledge base. Health system practice in a university health system setting, however, does offer the opportunity for pharmacists to become more specialized and focused in their practice if they have a particular interest.

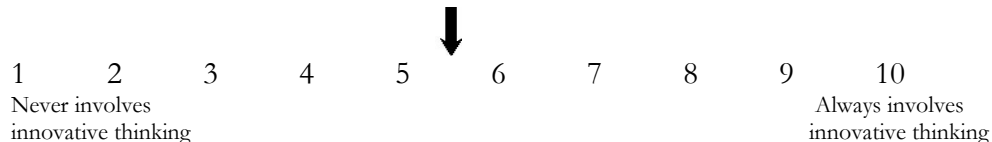
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Innovative Thinking

In response to the question, “To what extent does your practice involve generating new ideas (innovative thinking) pertaining to pharmacy?” respondents rated the factor a mid-range 5.6, indicating that their practice requires some innovative thinking. This is especially true in times of drug shortages when creative solutions must be used to provide appropriate care to patients.

= 5.6

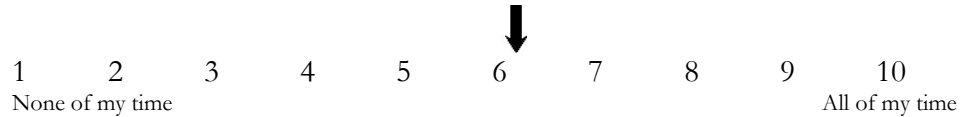


Applying Scientific Knowledge

Virtually every aspect of a health system pharmacist’s role involves the medications they learned about in pharmacy school, whether helping another health professional or the

patient directly. Applying the science behind the medication is important to help realize optimal therapy.

= 6.1



Applying Medical Knowledge

The utilization of medical knowledge is crucial in planning and development in a health system setting. Taking into account the collaboration with other professionals in the health system, applying one's medical knowledge keeps pharmacy aligned with all departments.

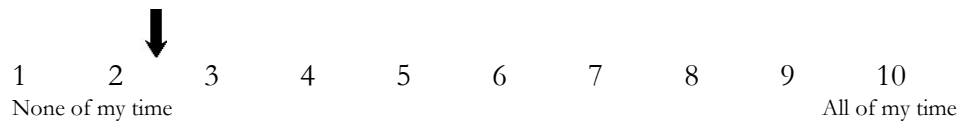
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Creating New Knowledge by Conducting Research

The standard community or rural health system may not be involved in research projects. More often, research activities take place in university teaching health systems. These facilities are typically larger and serve a variety of patient populations; the more diverse patient population usually affords conducting research projects on new medications or therapies.

= 2.4



Management/Supervision of Others

Health system inpatient pharmacists, at a minimum, interact with and supervise numerous technicians, and have the potential to grow into other management positions.

= 4.4



Management/Supervision of a Business

Inpatient pharmacists rated this factor a 3.3. Health system managers are involved in more business oversight than are staff pharmacists.

= 3.3



Pressure/Stress

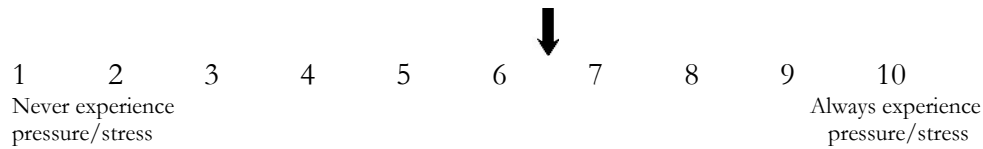
Health system inpatient pharmacists reported that they frequently work under pressure or experience work-related stress. This is especially true when dealing with patients in critical

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care situations. Minor adjustments in therapy can sometimes mean the difference between whether a patient goes home or stays in the health system. At times, these adjustments are needed immediately.

= 6.5



Work Schedule

Health systems are unique from many other work environments because they must stay open 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. This can make the work schedule difficult for pharmacists because they are needed on the night shift, on holidays, and during weekends. However, staff pharmacists report that their work schedule was generally predictable with a 6.1 rating. Although they may work odd hours including weekends and night shift occasionally, the schedule is typically a rotating one allowing for predictability.

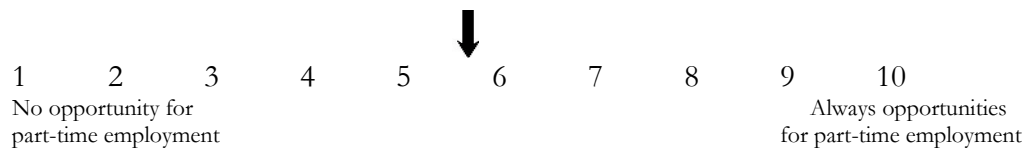
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Part-Time Opportunities

Because health systems never close, there is an opportunity for pharmacists to work part-time, filling in schedule gaps. There is generally the opportunity to work a couple days or evenings during the week within the health system setting.

= 5.8



Job-Sharing Opportunities

There are limited job-sharing opportunities for health system staff pharmacists.

= 3.1



Exit/Re-entry Opportunities

Opportunities do exist to exit/re-entry for health system staff positions. The difficulty here is being able to re-enter the same position.

= 4.9



Parental Leave Opportunities

As health systems are larger organizations, parental leave tends to be one of the benefits offered to employees.

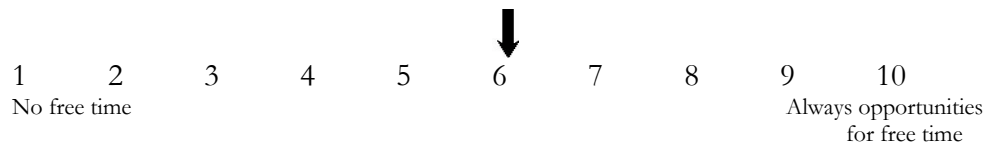
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Leisure/Family Time

Respondents indicate that despite holidays, weekends, and overnight shifts, they had the ability to plan free time for themselves and their family. This is related to the predictable work schedule that health system pharmacists enjoy.

= 6.1



Job Security

Rated at a 7.1, health system inpatient pharmacists generally have substantial job security.

= 7.1



Opportunities for Advancement

In health system pharmacy, opportunities to advance could include becoming more specialized in practice or becoming involved in management and administration. The opportunity for either is greater within larger organizations.

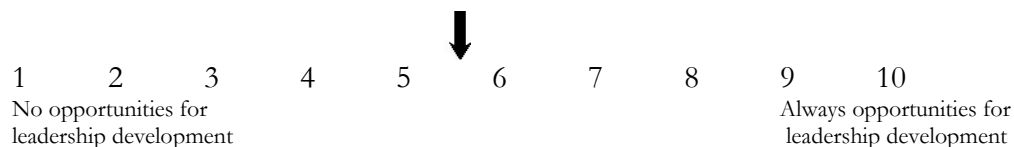
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Opportunities for Leadership Development

Leadership development was rated 5.6 in the survey response. As a health system inpatient pharmacist, developing leadership may not be needed for most job aspects. However, it can be important when working with other health care professionals in making decisions on medication choices and therapy adjustments and especially for pharmacy managers.

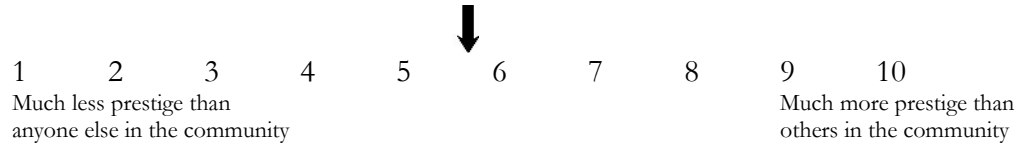
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Community Prestige

Especially in the smaller community health system setting, pharmacists often become well known in their community for the services they provide. Their community prestige can be tied at times to the strength of the outreach that the health system provides.

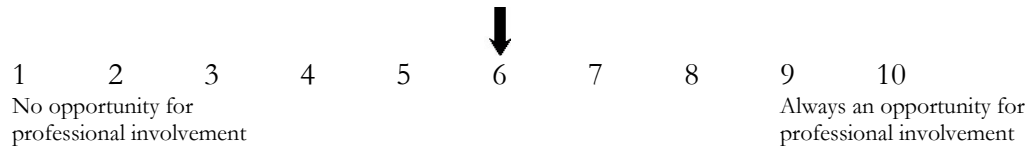
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Professional Involvement

Professional involvement of individual pharmacists is crucial to the development of the profession as a whole. Pharmacists need to communicate with each other so that the profession can continue to advance toward providing optimum health care for the public. In this survey, health system staff pharmacists were in the mid-range for having the opportunity to be professionally involved in meetings and events in their profession.

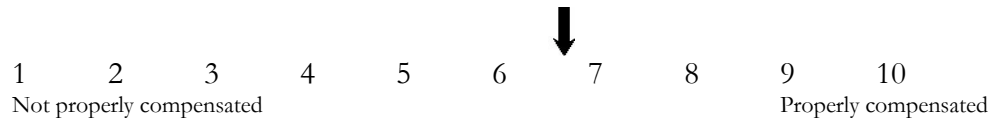
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Income

Generally health system inpatient pharmacists feel that they are properly compensated.

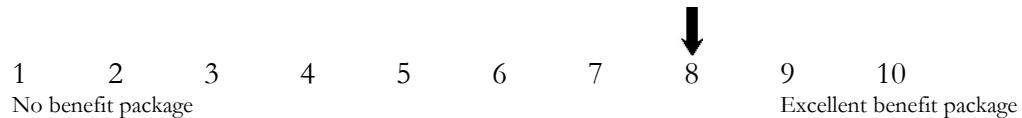
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Benefits (vacation, health, retirement)

Often directly linked to income or salary, respondents rated benefits higher than income. Health system inpatient pharmacists indicated that they have good benefits.

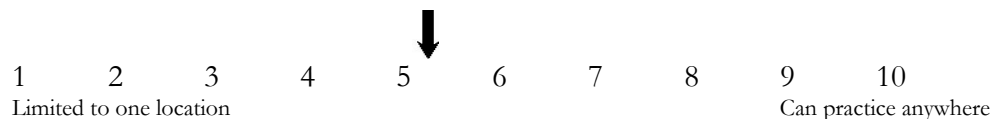
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Geographic Location

Health system staff pharmacists feel they can practice in many places throughout the country.

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Working Remotely

There is little opportunity for inpatient pharmacists to work remotely. Some outliers would

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include the limited opportunities for pharmacists to work full time from home doing mostly order entry (using scanned copies of orders) and other non-dispensing functions.

= 2.4



Autonomy

In a health system, working with other health care professionals as a team, a pharmacist is looked to as the medication use expert. The pharmacist's opinion on medication use is trusted by other providers and implemented when treating a patient. This gives the pharmacists a good deal of autonomy in their work.

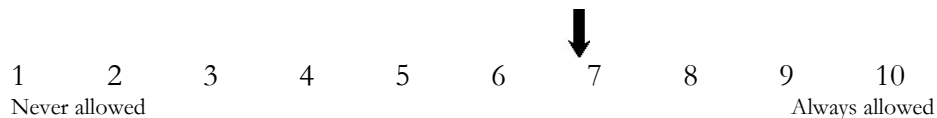
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Self-Worth

Health system staff pharmacists feel a great deal of self-worth in their work. Helping make critical therapy decisions, working with other health care professionals, and making a difference in patients' lives all contribute to feeling value in the work they do.

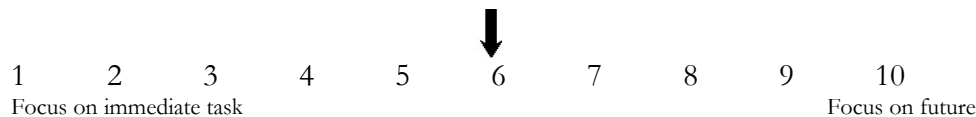
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Future Focus

Respondents indicated that they are mid-range in focusing on immediate tasks versus being future focused. Health systems care for a mix of patients; some are in and out of the health system in a matter of days, while others may be in the health system for weeks to months. With longer-term patients, pharmacists must think ahead and determine what may be needed, anticipating therapy for those patients as they progress.

= 5.9



Professional Prestige

Working with other health care professionals on a day-to-day basis, pharmacists become well known in the health system for their abilities by physicians, nurses, and others. However, there is usually little chance for interacting with other pharmacists and professionals outside of their own health system.

= 4.8



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Unique Practice Environment

The uniqueness of the health system practice environment will depend greatly on each health system's characteristics and pharmacy layout. In the classic centralized-pharmacy setting, there may not be much opportunity for unique practice approaches. However, in health systems that employ satellite pharmacies, there is a chance for pharmacists to get much more involved with their patients and with other professionals.

= 4.6



Advanced Degree

Typically in health system pharmacy, an advanced degree is required only if the individual chooses to pursue a management position or wants to become specialized in an area of practice. Since the nature of the practice may not be geared as much to research, advanced degrees typically are not required.

= 4.1



Entrepreneurial Opportunity

There are very few entrepreneurial opportunities for health system staff pharmacists.

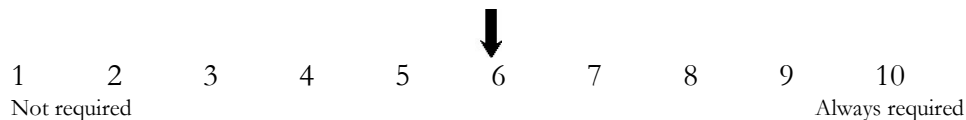
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Additional Training

With the number of conditions and treatments encountered in a health system, staff pharmacists must continually keep up with new research and therapy regimens. The health system is a very natural venue for learning and adding to one's knowledge set.

= 5.9



Interacting With Colleagues

Considering that this factor is one of the more appealing aspects described by survey respondents, it is not surprising that it ranks as high as it does.

= 7.1



Mean Scores for Critical Factors

1. Interaction with people	4.0
2. Performing physical assessments	1.6
3. Interpreting laboratory values	5.4
4. Continuity of relationships	2.9
5. Extent to which effect is direct	5.3
6. Collaboration with other professionals	6.9
7. Educating other professionals	4.7
8. Variety of daily activities	5.2
9. Multiple task handling	7.1
10. Problem solving	4.6
11. Focus of expertise	4.2
12. Innovative thinking	5.6
13. Applying scientific knowledge	6.1
14. Applying medical knowledge	7.1
15. Creating new knowledge by conducting research	2.4
16. Managing others	4.4
17. Managing business operations	3.3
18. Pressure/Stress	6.5
19. Work schedule	6.1
20. Part time opportunities	5.8
21. Job sharing	3.1
22. Exit and re-entry	4.9
23. Parental leave	7.0
24. Free time for leisure/family activities	6.1
25. Job security	7.1
26. Opportunities for advancement	4.9
27. Opportunities for leadership development	5.6
28. Community prestige	5.8
29. Professional involvement	6.0
30. Income	6.8
31. Benefits (vacation, health, retirement)	8.0
32. Geographic location	5.2
33. Working Remotely	2.4
34. Autonomy	6.5
35. Self-Worth	6.8
36. Future focus	5.9
37. Professional prestige	4.8
38. Unique practice environment	4.6
39. Advanced degree	4.1
40. Entrepreneurial opportunity	2.2
41. Additional training	5.9
42. Interacting with co-workers	7.1
43. Travel	1.7
44. Writing	2.6
45. Working with teams	5.5

Reference

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

Professional Organizations

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American Society of Health-System Pharmacists (ASHP)
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Board of Pharmacy Specialties (BPS)
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