

# Ambulatory Care Pharmacy

## Holland Code: SIR

### 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% 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.”

Adapted from the American Pharmacists Association