

Association Management

Holland Code: ESI

Background

A large number of pharmacists serve as volunteers in a variety of pharmacy-related professional (individual members) and trade (company members) associations—either as officers (elected) or as committee members (appointed). A smaller but still substantial number of pharmacists choose association management as a career pathway, turning their pharmacy background, experience, and leadership skills into a challenging, full-time career.

There are many functional areas found within the scope of pharmacy association management including government relations, clinical education, professional development, and professional advocacy. Today, more than 151,000 associations exist in the United States, representing nearly every industry, profession, charity, hobby, cause, and interest. There are associations at the local, state, regional, national and international levels.

Pharmacy has many national, state, and local associations. “Broad spectrum” associations, representing all pharmacists, such as the American Pharmacists Association, exist at the national level and in all 50 states. Narrower, special-interest organizations of pharmacists (e.g., representing various practice areas) exist at the national level and to a lesser degree at the state or local levels. Virtually all such organizations have pharmacists employed within their full-time professional management team, frequently including the chief executive officer.

Recognizing the need to educate pharmacists for careers in association management, the American Society of Health-System Pharmacists (ASHP) began an Executive Residency in Association Management in 1968. Other pharmacy associations began residencies and fellowships in the 1990s and those currently offering programs include the American Pharmacists Association Foundation, the National Association of Chain Drug Stores (NACDS), and the National Community Pharmacists Association (NCPA), the Academy of Managed Care Pharmacists (AMCP), and the Pharmacy Quality Alliance (PQA). The American Pharmacists Association (APhA) also offers APPE rotations and internship opportunities.

Characteristics

Forty pharmacists identified themselves in this category in the 2012 *APhA Career Pathway Evaluation Program* survey. Forty-six percent hold a PharmD degree up significantly from 2007 when only 16% of respondents had either an entry level or post baccalaureate PharmD. Thirty-eight percent indicated they had an advanced degree (MA, MS, MBS, PhD, or other), while 42% had been through a residency program. In addition, 38% had been through a certificate program and 11% reported completing other training. Such additional education might be outside the field of pharmacy, as would be the case in attaining Certified Association Executive status from the American Society of Association Executives (ASAE).

Nearly all respondents indicated that they were satisfied with their job with 75% indicating “extremely satisfied” and 20% indicating “somewhat satisfied.” Similarly, the respondents said

that they felt the job was very challenging with 52% indicating “extremely challenging” and 43% indicated they felt the job was “somewhat challenging.” Respondents’ average age was 45 years old. More than half (58%) of the respondents were male. Income and hours worked per week is highly variable in this field. Fifteen percent reported incomes less than \$100,000 and 33% reported greater than \$150,000. The average time worked per week was 44.5 hours with a standard deviation of 16.

Insider’s Perspective

What aspects of the job are most appealing?

Associations offer a number of programs and services to their members and the public, including professional education meetings, public information and education, codes of conduct/ethics, professional and safety standards, and/or the development of statistical information that are heavily depended upon by businesses and government. This diversity of scope is reflected by respondents, with 52% stating that the most appealing aspect of the position is diversity of the work. Forty-three 43% cited the ability to “advocate on behalf of the profession” and “influence public policy” as the most appealing aspect of association management.

What aspects of the job are least appealing?

No one single factor was listed by the respondents as a least appealing feature of the position. Both the amount of travel and long hours were each cited by several of the respondents as the least appealing aspects they see. Other comments such as “continuous email,” “demanding workload,” and “long time away when traveling” were frequently repeated.

What advice should students and practitioners consider when selecting the option of association management?

Many of the respondents recommended that pharmacists have prior practice experience if contemplating a career in pharmacy association management. Communication skills were cited as being vitally important for this field. Several indicated that those considering this field need the ability to be self-starters and to multitask.

Adapted from the American Pharmacists Association