

Chain Community Pharmacy

Holland Code: SCE

Background

Chain pharmacy provides two primary career paths for pharmacists: management and staff. As a general definition, a community pharmacy is considered a “chain community pharmacy” if the organization consists of four or more stores.

Community pharmacy is often seen as an excellent opportunity to conduct basic preliminary health assessments of patients. Quick evaluation of symptoms, laboratory values, and other indicators can be helpful in directing patients’ therapy, especially as the community pharmacists’ role in overall patient care continues to expand, such as by providing immunizations and medication therapy management (MTM) services.

In chain community pharmacy, the breadth of duties of a manager is defined by the size and requirements of the pharmacy or organization. At the store level, the pharmacy manager is typically in charge of the staff, patient care services, inventory management, recruitment, training and development, and general business management. In larger chains, especially those that are corporately owned or franchised, there are many more levels of management that extend from district managers to pharmacy operation executives, with the scope of responsibilities expanding accordingly. Pharmacists are critical in upper management of corporate chains because they provide real-world practice knowledge and experience when making crucial pharmacy business decisions. More details about this type of role can be found in the profile for Corporate Management.

As the provision of pharmacists’ patient care services within the community setting expands, there are new positions emerging in chain community pharmacy that are focused on the management and training of pharmacists delivering these services. The role of these pharmacists – whose titles may include “clinical coordinators” – varies in different chains but can include providing direct patient care to many pharmacies within a district, training staff pharmacists to provide new clinical services, seeking out contracts with local health care payers such as employers, public health entities and collaborating with other health care providers.

Characteristics

One-hundred sixty-nine chain community pharmacists responded to the 2012 *APhA Career Pathway Evaluation Program Survey*. Forty-nine percent reported having a PharmD degree. Seventeen percent had obtained an advanced degree such as an MA, MS, MBA, PhD, or other. Six percent had been through a residency, 45% had some type of certification, and 8% had completed some other type of training. Respondents’ average age was 46 years old. Slightly more than half (57%) of respondents were

female. Income data show 27% earn less than \$100,000 (includes those working part time) and 48% earn \$100,000 - \$130,000. The average time worked per week was 46 hours.

Most of respondents indicated that they were satisfied with their work, with 23% indicating “extremely satisfied” and 44% indicating “somewhat satisfied.” Thirty percent of respondents said that they felt the work was “extremely challenging” and 49% indicated it was “somewhat challenging.”

Insider’s Perspective

What aspects of the job are most appealing?

Many of the respondents indicated that the time that they get to spend interacting with patients is the most appealing aspect of their job. Some mentioned that the appreciation shown to them by customers and the ability to fill their needs are particularly rewarding. One respondent commented that “working in a pharmacy in a grocery store in the community where I live is like an old-fashioned community pharmacy. I know my patients and they know me. Also it affords a great opportunity to discuss how lifestyle changes can make a difference in health.” Other pharmacists commented that they enjoyed the flexible work hours, good salary, working with students and providing MTM and immunization services.

What aspects of the job are least appealing?

Many pharmacists made comments about how difficult it can be at times to operate under the stress of filling a large volume of prescriptions quickly. Others said that it is sometimes difficult to take breaks when there are many patients waiting for their medications. One pharmacist said that “the pace of the work place is too fast some days to give the patient the time they need.”

Keeping in mind that patients often go to the pharmacy at the end of a long day of being sick and waiting for doctor appointments, it makes sense that some pharmacists said that patients are sometimes difficult to deal with. Many pharmacists also said that it is challenging to work through billing and insurance problems.

What advice should students and practitioners consider when selecting the option of chain community pharmacy management?

Many of the respondents to this survey said that it is very important for someone considering a career in chain pharmacy to be a “people person” because of all the work that is done with the public. One pharmacist had the following advice: “Need to be a people person and a good multitasker. Be willing to get involved in your community and with community and other healthcare organizations. Stay informed about and get engaged with state and national issues that impact pharmacy practice.”

Adapted from the American Pharmacists Association