

Community Health Center Holland Code: SEI

Background

Community health center (CHC) pharmacists play an important role in providing needed health care services and information to the underserved. These pharmacists fulfill the medication and information needs of patients in an outpatient setting and advise health care professionals working with outpatients at CHCs and clinics. Working with a broad range of patient ages and disease states, these pharmacists typically have full access to medical records. In addition, direct patient care is seen as a very strong component in many of the practice environments. The scope of practice and responsibilities in CHCs varies significantly by individual location. Pharmacists can be in a CHC with or without a dispensing component.

CHC pharmacists have diverse responsibilities in the health care system. Twenty-three percent of their time is spent dispensing medications (including the associated patient counseling). An additional 18% is spent on business and department management, followed by 18% for patient care services (e.g., medication therapy management, disease management), and 8% for personnel management.

Pharmacists in these settings also conduct wellness and preventive health programs. Some states allow CHC pharmacists to serve as primary care providers working within collaborative practice agreements with physicians following agreed upon protocols. This type of protocol may include prescribing authority. One pharmacist commented that students and other practitioners interested in CHC pharmacy should understand that “working in community health is rewarding and meaningful—there are opportunities to really impact the quality of care patients receive.”

Characteristics

Twenty-six CHC pharmacists responded to the 2012 *APhA Career Pathway Evaluation Program* survey. Sixty-four percent of respondents held PharmD degrees. Five percent indicated an advanced degree (MA, MS, MBS PhD, or other). Twenty-eight percent had been through a residency program (nearly double from 2007 data), 65% had been through a certificate training program (significantly increased from the 15% reported in 2007), and 10% reported having been through some form of other training.

Respondents' average age was 44 years old. Seventy-three percent of respondents were female. Sixty-eight percent indicated some type of management role. Income data show just over half (60%) earn between \$90,000–\$120,000 per year. The average time worked per week was 42.4 hours. An overwhelming majority of respondents indicated that they were satisfied with their work, with 68% indicating “extremely satisfied” and 28% indicating “somewhat satisfied.” Similarly, most respondents indicated that they felt

the work was quite challenging, with 56% indicating “extremely challenging” and 32% indicating “somewhat challenging.”

Insider’s Perspective

What aspects of the job are most appealing?

Owing to the variety of work environments, duties, and responsibilities, the most appealing aspects of the role vary with the setting. Many respondents indicated that “counseling patients” and “direct patient care” were the two most appealing aspects of their work. A number indicated that providing services to those who most need it is very rewarding. One respondent expressed enjoyment in having “connections with providers and patients so I can be open with both in discussing the patient’s health”

What aspects of the job are least appealing?

Competing for scarce resources was listed respondents as one of the least appealing aspects of their work. One respondent wrote of concern for “dealing with insufficient grant monies to further the missions of our CHC.” Other pharmacists indicated that administrative and regulatory duties are the least appealing aspects they encounter. Also cited were language barriers and paperwork as areas that are of concern.

What advice should students and practitioners consider when selecting the option of becoming a CHC pharmacist?

One theme was repeated by respondents about their career choice: many asked that students and practitioners be open to the idea of working in a CHC. Many advised visiting a variety of centers to see how different they are. In addition, respondents commented on the “clinical nature” of the practice and the ability to use “communication skills.” One respondent gave the following words of advice: “Consider working within training programs for other health care providers. Strong communication skills in the language of another profession will open doors.”

Adapted from the American Pharmacists Association