

Independent Community Pharmacy

Holland Code: SEC

Background

An independent community pharmacy may be a single store with a sole proprietor or may consist of several stores owned by an individual or small group. Some independent pharmacy owners own multiple locations, making it seem like more of a regional chain. Since the stores are owned by an individual or a small private group, they are considered “independent.” In practice, small chains with four or more stores may function much more like a traditional independent pharmacy rather than a chain, if that is the objective of the owner(s).

Owning an independent pharmacy can be very rewarding. It provides the opportunity to practice pharmacy in accord with one’s personal style. Changes can be implemented quickly and pharmacists in independent community pharmacy can offer specialty services or fill a niche in the community. Yet, with opportunity come demands—particularly on time. In addition to clinical and traditional pharmacy services, independent pharmacists typically get involved to a greater extent in merchandising, marketing, and other general management functions.

Management of an independent community pharmacy is usually the duty of the owner. In some settings, the manager may be an employee pharmacist, particularly when the pharmacy consists of two or more community outlets. In some independent community pharmacies, the staff pharmacist is also the assistant manager of the pharmacy. Occasions can arise when independent community pharmacists decide to sell their store(s), such as when they feel it is time either to have someone else take over the management side of the business or upon retirement. An independent pharmacy owner may be willing to work out creative financing and will often be interested in continuing to work on at least a part-time basis.

Staff pharmacists in independent pharmacy often report to the owner(s) directly. This can create unique challenges and opportunities. Building and maintaining relationships with patients in the community is an important responsibility of pharmacists in independent community pharmacies, one that is appealing to most pharmacists in this setting. These relationships are often the foundation on which the business has been built and prospered.

The roles and responsibilities of a staff pharmacist will vary at different pharmacies. A pharmacist at one independent pharmacy may be primarily responsible for patient services while at another pharmacy the staff pharmacist may be primarily responsible for supervising technicians. A staff pharmacist in an independent community pharmacy is often in a position to bring about change and implement new services, including medication therapy management (MTM). Good communication skills and an outgoing

personality are valuable traits for pharmacists interested in pursuing independent community pharmacy.

Fifty percent of the respondents' time is spent dispensing medications, including the associated patient counseling. Business/department management requires an additional 11%, followed by medication preparation/compounding at 10%.

Characteristics

One hundred one pharmacists in independent community pharmacy responded to the 2012

APhA Career Evaluation Pathway Program survey. Fifty-two percent held a bachelor of pharmacy degree and 40% of respondents held a PharmD degree. Seven percent reported having an MBA. Eleven percent had been through a residency program; 59% had been through a certificate training program, and 13% reported having been through some form of other training. Respondents' average age was 49 years old. Just over half (51%) of respondents were female. Sixty-three percent indicated some type of management role. Income data show 24% of respondents earn \$80,000–\$100,000. Forty-six percent earn less than \$100,000; 23% earn between \$100,000 and \$120,000; and 26% earn greater than \$120,000. The average time worked per week was 41 hours.

Respondents indicated that they were satisfied with their work, with 51% indicating “extremely satisfied” and 38% indicating “somewhat satisfied.” Similarly, most respondents indicated that they felt the work was quite challenging with 41% indicating “extremely challenging” and 52% indicating “somewhat challenging.”

Insider's Perspective

What aspects of the job are most appealing?

By far the most frequent response to this dealt with the ability to work with patients in a meaningful way. Independent pharmacists really feel that they are able to have an impact on their patients' health in a positive way. The main reason many independent community pharmacists initially entered the profession was to help patients. One respondent indicated enjoyment in “working with my patients, the opportunity to know them all by name and assist them with a variety of health issues.”

Another recurrent theme was the enjoyment in the autonomy of an independent pharmacy environment and the variety in daily activities. One pharmacist said they enjoyed “the opportunity to solve new problems every day.”

What aspects of the job are least appealing?

Insurance and billing issues were common concerns for these pharmacists. Comments included: “working with insurance companies to get prior authorizations approved” and “dealing with the insurance company or PBM and making sure we are getting paid enough to at least cover the cost of the drugs.”

While many pharmacists said that they really liked the variety of daily activities this also comes with a negative of balancing competing responsibilities. One pharmacist said that they struggled with “trying to manage my time between pharmacy operations and managerial duties of the business.”

Others reported problems with the physical demands of a full time community practice career. Pharmacists in this setting often are on their feet for the entire shift which could be very long. This is not unique to independent pharmacies and is also a concern for chain community pharmacists.

What advice should students and practitioners consider when selecting a management position in independent community pharmacy?

Overall, most indicated the need to have good communication skills and a strong desire to help others. This cannot be overemphasized considering the fact that community pharmacists are generally the most accessible health professional. This is especially true in rural communities where patients are not bashful about calling their pharmacist at home for much-needed advice or to have a prescription filled.

Others commented on the importance of learning sound business skills, which aren't always emphasized during pharmacy school. Included in this area are marketing skills, personnel management, etc. One pharmacist gave the following advice: “Working for a small business often means the buck stops with you. Be invested in the business, be prepared to make decisions and judgment calls, and defend them.”

Adapted from the American Pharmacists Association