

# Pharmaceutical Industry Sales and Marketing

## Holland Code: SER

### Background

Many definitions have been applied to the pharmaceutical industry sales and marketing divisions. Some aspects focus on the capability to analyze the needs of a given market and others on developing communications about specific therapies and products. This is the business of promoting pharmaceuticals both for the clinical aspects of the product as well as gaining market share. Pharmacists in this field follow guidelines and rules supported throughout the industry. PhRMA—the Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers of America—created a code several years ago for sales and marketing personnel to follow. The information below gives a glimpse of the depth of the PhRMA Code\*:

In addition to prohibiting small gifts and reminder items such as pens, notepads, staplers, clipboards, pill boxes, etc., the revised Code:

1. Prohibits company sales representatives from providing restaurant meals to health care professionals, but allows them to provide occasional meals in health care professionals' offices in conjunction with informational presentations.
2. Includes new provisions requiring companies to ensure their representatives are sufficiently trained about applicable laws, regulations, and industry codes of practice and ethics.
3. Provides that each company will state its intentions to abide by the Code and that company CEOs and compliance officers will certify each year that they have processes in place to comply.
4. Includes more detailed standards regarding the independence of continuing medical education.
5. Provides additional guidance and restrictions for speaking and consulting arrangements with health care professionals.

\*PhRMA Code—revised guidelines  
2009

In addition to the traditional sales calls, there has been an emergence of new communication vehicles used. Social media technologies are changing the pharmaceutical marketing process. The opportunities to work with multiple media vehicles have opened new marketing strategies and sales initiatives.

## Characteristics

Twenty-four pharmaceutical sales and marketing pharmacists responded to the 2012 *APhA Career Pathway Evaluation Program* survey. Seventy-three percent of respondents held an entry level BS pharmacy degree; 26% held the PharmD degree; 6% indicated that they also had a non-pharmacy bachelor's degree and 40% indicated an advanced degree (MA, MS, MBS, PhD, or other). Six percent had been through a residency program, 13% had been through a certificate training program, and 13% reported having been through some form of other training. Respondents' average age was 47 years old. Forty percent of respondents were female. Income data show less than 1% earn between \$80,000–\$100,000, while 99% earn \$100,000 or more per year, with 67% 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 role, with 65% indicating “extremely satisfied” and 26% indicating “somewhat satisfied.” Similarly, most respondents indicated that they felt the job was challenging, with 52% indicating “extremely challenging” and 44% indicating “somewhat challenging.”

## Insider's Perspective

### What aspects of the job are most appealing?

Because of the great variety of positions in the pharmaceutical sales and marketing areas, duties, and responsibilities, there are only a few items that all respondents indicate as most or least appealing aspects. Numerous items were provided by less than 10% of respondents. What is true for one specialty practice is not necessarily true for other practices. One of the most appealing aspects of these roles, cited by 27% of pharmacist respondents, was related to the impact they can have on patients. For many, this is an indirect benefit of the role. The same percentage also indicated that an appealing aspect was working and collaborating with other health care professionals (i.e., pharmacists, physicians, nurses, or others).

One respondent stated, “Love interaction with clinicians throughout the health care market.” Another added enjoyment in “Working with pharmacists and nurses to improve patient safety and save costs.” Thirteen percent cited the work environment as one of the most appealing aspects of their role. Many corporate offices are modern and have amenities that can be used by employees. One commented on working in a “very nice work environment.”

### What aspects of the job are least appealing?

Bureaucracy and politics were both cited by 18% of pharmacists as among the least appealing aspects of their role. These pharmacists are very satisfied with the work they perform, but one respondent stated finding the “administrative work and the politics of a large corporation” as a least appealing aspect of the role. Administrative paperwork and

travel were cited by 9% of the respondents. One respondent indicated not liking the “travel and being away from clinical practice.”

**What advice should students and practitioners consider when selecting the option of becoming a pharmaceutical sales and marketing pharmacist?**

Comments were broad based with no specific theme. Two pharmacists’ comments provide a general feeling for what most of the respondents suggested: “Work outside the industry first—community or institutional. Working your way through the various positions becomes an enabler for [pharmacists] to expand their sphere of influence. [Pharmacists] can more successfully articulate their solutions when they’ve experienced the challenges of the job.” “Need a personal interest in non-clinical setting; need hands-on clinical experience to develop knowledge base in many therapeutic categories; need high level of intellectual curiosity; have to be highly motivated with good written and verbal communications skills; need entrepreneurial instincts/drive.”

Adapted from the American Pharmacists Association