

Pharmaceutical Industry: Medical Science Liaison

Holland Code: RCE

Background

Pharmacists in industry are employed in a variety of positions. Although practice titles, descriptions, and prerequisites differ by company, the educational requirements for these positions are often similar. Most pharmacists in industry work in the following areas: research and development, all phases of drug product development, sales and marketing, corporate administration, all phases of clinical trials research, drug information, manufacturing, regulatory affairs, health policy, scientific/ professional affairs (e.g., professional relations, professional education, medical science liaison (MSL, medical information), and quality control.

Many pharmacists go on to obtain postgraduate degrees to meet the technical demands and scientific duties required in the pharmaceutical industry. Pharmacists with an interest in clinical work can combine this interest with their scientific background in pharmacy by serving as liaisons. MSLs call on a variety of health care professionals to educate them on the uses, merits, and scientific data related to the products their firms produce. Experienced and successful MSLs with administrative and management abilities often rise to supervisory or executive posts in the pharmaceutical industry. Pharmaceutical industry corporate facilities are located throughout the United States, although there is heavier geographic concentration in the Northeast (including Delaware, New Jersey, New York, and Pennsylvania), the Midwest (including Illinois and Indiana), the Mid-Atlantic (North Carolina), and the West Coast (California), where many biotechnology start-up firms are headquartered.

However, most MSL positions are not at the corporate office and in fact are tied more closely to the constituents with whom they work: physicians, pharmacists, and nurses. Many companies have a different perspective of the roles for the MSL and they are often located in different divisions when looking from company to company. Some are within research and development, some in sales and marketing, and some in the corporate division.

According to the survey results, MSLs in the pharmaceutical industry indicated that they spend 37% of their time in the "Other" category. This time probably includes the time they spend working with other health professionals and providing information about their products. This is followed by 12% of their time spent on both data management and project/case management. An additional 11% of their time is spent on teaching.

Characteristics

Twenty-nine Medical Science Liaison pharmacists responded to the 2012 *APhA Career*

Pathway Evaluation Program survey. Eighty-five percent of the respondents held a PharmD degree. Thirty-seven percent indicated an advanced degree (MA, MS, MBA, or PhD). Thirty-seven percent had completed a residency program, 20% a fellowship and 29% had received certificate training. Respondents' average age was 44 years old. More than half (54%) of the respondents were female. Income data show that only 4% earn less than \$100,000, 21% earn \$110,000 - \$120,000 and a majority, 58%, earn \$150,000 or more.

The majority of respondents indicated that they were satisfied with their work, with 55% indicating "extremely satisfied" and 31% indicating "somewhat satisfied." Respondents related that their work was challenging, with 38% indicating "extremely challenging" and 52% indicating "somewhat challenging."

Insider's Perspective

What aspects of the job are most appealing?

Many respondents indicated that the most appealing aspect of their work was the flexible scheduling. Others enjoyed "the constantly changing activities, things are never boring." One respondent said they enjoyed "providing valuable information to prescribers who can assist patients in making informed choices and better lives. Several respondents commented that they liked that their job allowed them to use their knowledge; one said they liked "being able to apply my medical and pharmaceutical knowledge to product development and marketing."

What aspects of the job are least appealing?

Several respondents said that they didn't particularly enjoy the amount of travel required by their position. One said "occasionally there are times when there is a lot of travel required and that can be very taxing." One respondent said the following about the level of specialization that is common in this field: "You can become an expert in one field and it then becomes difficult to keep up in other disease state areas."

What advice should students and practitioners consider when selecting the option of working in the pharmaceutical industry as a medical science liaison?

One respondent summed up the thoughts of many of the others saying: "There is no set routine or schedule for this type of job - you have to be able to manage your own time/schedule and be able to work by yourself from home (no office with colleagues/coworkers, etc.). Being able to work independently and set your own timelines/goals is very important. Also, being flexible with your schedule as sometimes you will have to rearrange things on short notice to accommodate an important meeting or presentation that comes up with little notice."

Adapted from the American Pharmacists Association