

Health System Pharmacy Inpatient Holland Code: CES

Background

The inpatient setting of health system pharmacy is unique in a number of ways. The patients treated by a health system pharmacist typically have more complicated conditions than those in an ambulatory setting and take multiple medications. A staff pharmacist may have exposure to oncology, intravenous (IV) medication therapy, neonatal care, nutrition, pain therapy, geriatrics, and much more. Staff pharmacists face a varied set of responsibilities including dispensing medication, making purchasing decisions, monitoring drug therapy, preparing IV medication, and overseeing drug administration.

The location and layout of the pharmacy can vary greatly among health systems. Some are centralized, with all of the pharmacy staff and equipment located in a single area of the hospital, usually on one of the lower floors. Another format is the decentralized pharmacy, where there is a main pharmacy in a central location but there are also “mini-pharmacies,” called satellites, located throughout the health system at key patient care units. The type of the pharmacy depends on the size, needs, resources, and focus of the health system.

Health system pharmacists interact with nurses and physicians in their positions. Often, they do not work directly with the patient, but rather with the other health care providers to optimize the patient’s therapy. In some health systems, however, there are opportunities for pharmacists to see patients by rounding with physicians and nurses or by providing discharge counseling.

Twenty four percent of a health system inpatient pharmacist’s time is spent on medication dispensing and associated patient counseling. Eighteen percent of their time is spent on medication management services and another 14% is spent patient management services.

Characteristics

One hundred thirty-nine health system staff pharmacists responded to the 2012 *APhA Career Pathway Evaluation Program* survey. Seventy percent of respondents indicated having a PharmD degree. Twenty-three percent of respondents earned an advanced degree such as an MA, MS, or MBA. Twenty-four percent had been through a residency, and 26% indicated they had been through certificate training. Twenty percent

of respondents indicated that they had obtained BPS certification. The respondents' average age was 45 years old. Well over half of the respondents (65%) were female. Annual income data show 25% reporting an income between less than \$100,000, 37% earning between \$100,000 - \$120,000, and 34% earning over \$120,000.

The majority of respondents indicated that they were satisfied with their job with 44% indicating "extremely satisfied" and 46% indicating "somewhat satisfied." Respondents felt the job was challenging with 36% indicating "extremely challenging" and 53% indicating "somewhat challenging."

Insider's Perspective

What aspects of the job are most appealing?

Respondents seemed to emphasize that they really liked the interaction that they have with their pharmacist and interdisciplinary colleagues. Pharmacists also felt that they were able to positively influence patient care and health system policy in their position within the inpatient pharmacy. One pharmacist articulated his feelings in this way: "There are opportunities to influence medication use at both the organizational level; and at the individual patient level through collaborative direct patient care."

Many other respondents indicated that they enjoyed the flexibility and variety of their daily work. One respondent said that she enjoyed "the variety of the work and the opportunity to expand my scope of practice and always look for new challenges."

What aspects of the job are least appealing?

Many of the respondents indicated that workload and long hours were the least appealing aspect of their work. Others were concerned with the management and administration, workflow issues, and medication shortages. One respondent summed up many concerns about the bureaucracy within a large health system by expressing that the least appealing aspect is "the centralized top-down organizational decision making structure with limited opportunities for non-managers to participate more actively in departmental decision-making."

What advice should students and practitioners consider when selecting the option of health system staff pharmacy?

Many pharmacists recommended that residency training should be completed before pursuing a career in an inpatient setting. Other skills that were considered critical included the ability to problem solve, being open to lifelong learning, and being open to varying opportunities.

Adapted from the American Pharmacists Association