

Medical Communications/Drug Information

Holland Code: EIS

Background

Pharmacists who specialize in medical communications/drug information provide educational services about pharmaceutical products for health care professionals, pharmaceutical industry personnel, and consumers. They may be employed by medical communications firms, pharmaceutical manufacturers, academic institutions, managed care organizations, hospitals, professional associations, clinical research organizations, or other health care settings. Their responsibilities vary by the type of setting in which they practice.

Their efforts may be internally focused, for example providing services to employees of a pharmaceutical manufacturer or as an in-house library and information service. Or their clientele may be the general public, for example providing information in a poison control center in response to queries from physicians, nurses, other pharmacists, or the general community. Perhaps more frequently, these pharmacists are manufacturers' employees with the responsibility for providing authoritative information on their company's products to pharmacists or physicians with specific information needs regarding a particular product (e.g., special dosage needs, unusual reactions). Additionally, many pharmacists are employed by medical communications companies or professional associations that publish authoritative drug information references.

Medical communications/drug information pharmacists have diverse responsibilities in the health care system. According to the survey, 26% of their time is spent on the "other" category. This likely includes the literature searching and writing that they do. Nineteen percent is spent on data management, followed by 12% on patient management services, 10% on teaching, and the remainder divided across a variety of other functions.

Characteristics

Fifteen pharmacists responded to the 2012 *APhA Career Pathway Evaluation Program Survey*. Among the respondents, 63% had earned a PharmD degree. Fifty-four percent had an advanced degree (MA, MS, MBA, PhD, or other degree). Many have undertaken educational or training programs beyond their earned pharmacy degree. Twenty-six percent had completed a residency, 35% had earned a certificate, and 9% had taken other training. The mean age was 43 years old and about two thirds (64%) were female. Almost two thirds (64%) identify themselves as being in management. Income data from this survey show that 22% of these pharmacists report that they earn between \$80,000–100,000 annually. Thirty-three percent earn \$110,000 - \$130,000 and 44% earn

\$140,000 or more. Medical communications/drug information pharmacists work an average of 42.5 hours per week.

Sixty-seven percent report that they were “extremely satisfied” with their work, with the remaining 33% indicating they were “somewhat satisfied.” The exact same proportion of responses were seen regarding how challenging the work is with 67% reported being “extremely challenged” with their work and the remaining 33% reported “somewhat challenged.” None were dissatisfied or unchallenged in their practice settings, which is similar to the survey conducted in 2007 of these pharmacists.

Insider’s Perspective

What aspects of the job are most appealing?

Medical communications/drug information pharmacists really seem to enjoy the work that they do. Many respondents said that their work is highly rewarding and has an optimal work schedule. One said, “I find the fact that through my work in medical informatics/drug information I help keep millions of patients safe from medication errors the most satisfying aspect of my job. There is excellent work/life balance - we keep Monday through Friday business hours.” Similarly, another respondent said they enjoyed “The ability to work independently, research new topics from multiple angles, and create my own schedule.”

What aspects of the job are least appealing?

Some found that the solitary nature of these positions were less appealing. One respondent said that the least appealing aspect of their job is the “lack of colleagues to... bounce ideas off of.” Another liked their position so much that they answered this question by saying, “I can’t think of any aspects of my current work that are not appealing. I wish it had not taken 20 years of my career to find this amazing opportunity.”

What advice should students and practitioners consider when selecting the option of medical communications/drug information pharmacy?

Several respondents advised that pharmacy experience is helpful before working in this field. One respondent said, “I would recommend gaining clinical and practical experience prior to joining the pharmaceutical industry, a lot more doors will be available to open.” Another echoed this sentiment saying, “My success in my current work setting hinges on years of experience in many aspects of pharmacy practice (retail - independent and chain practice sites, hospital, clinical specialist, academia and long-term care). Try many opportunities and gain as much experience as possible in order to be prepared for the most appealing position.” Other respondents advised “time management skills are critical; have to cope with meeting deadlines” and “have multiple resources of information at your fingertips.”

Adapted from the American Pharmacists Association