

## **Health-System Pharmacy: Outpatient Holland Code: SCI**

### **Background**

Outpatient pharmacy can be described as a diverse clinical practice environment. Most pharmacists in the outpatient setting provide multiple roles ranging from dispensing and counseling to medication therapy management (MTM) services and transition of care. The environment provides patients with the opportunity to speak one-on-one with a pharmacist and schedule MTM services and/or disease management services.

Outpatient pharmacy can be primary care–based or disease-specific services. For example, outpatient clinics can focus on HIV/AIDS, immunizations, lipids, diabetes, and other areas. The unique aspect of the environment is access to the patient’s medical record and the multidisciplinary approach where pharmacists work in teams with other health care providers.

### **Characteristics**

Forty-seven outpatient pharmacists responded to the 2012 *APhA Career Pathway Evaluation Program* survey. Sixty percent of respondents held an entry-level pharmacy degree; 40% held the PharmD degree. Fifteen percent indicated that they also had a non-pharmacy bachelor’s degree and 21% indicated an advanced degree (MA, MS, MBS, PhD, or other). Twenty-three percent had been through a residency program, 39% had been through a certificate training program, and 14% reported having been through some form of other training. Respondents’ average age was 46 years old. Sixty percent of respondents were female. Income data show 10% earn between \$80,000–\$100,000, while 77% earn \$100,000 or more per year, with 13% earning greater than \$150,000. The average time worked per week was 44 hours.

An overwhelming majority of respondents indicated that they were satisfied with their job, with 49% indicating “extremely satisfied” and 42% indicating “somewhat satisfied.” Similarly, most respondents indicated that they felt the job was challenging, with 36% indicating “extremely challenging” and 53% indicating “somewhat challenging.” Respondents indicated that they spend 38% of their time in the role of dispensing medication along with the associated patient counseling. Interacting with co-workers was one of the highest-rated critical factors for this group.

### **Insider’s Perspective**

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

Two of the most appealing aspects of these roles include collaboration with other health care providers and patient care/direct patient contact, cited by 19% of outpatient pharmacists. One respondent indicated “collaboration with health care providers in diabetes, hypertension, asthma, and immunization care” as an appealing aspect of the role. Another respondent stated, “What I like most is the one-on-one patient care, but also like the teamwork experience. Discharge counseling was cited by 16% of the respondents as one of the most appealing aspects of what they do. Pharmacists often work in settings with challenges that vary from day to day, thereby presenting opportunities to learn and grow professionally. One respondent summed up what many stated: the appeal of the position comes from “direct patient care—drug information—patient counseling.”

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

Administration (bureaucracy) and workload (short staffing numbers) were each cited by 16% of pharmacists as the least appealing aspects of their roles. These pharmacists are very satisfied with the work they perform, but do not enjoy how some policies and protocols are implemented. One respondent who was concerned with staffing levels stated, “I feel rushed rather than feeling as though I have as much time as patients need.” Another respondent was to the point when stating that the least appealing aspects were “long hours, short staffing.” Respondents indicated that they spend approximately 29% of their time on administrative roles.

### **What advice should students and practitioners consider when selecting the option of health-system outpatient pharmacy?**

Twenty-five percent of the outpatient pharmacists cited the importance of being open to alternatives because there are multiple opportunities in some of the environments. Continuing education and training are important to succeed in this environment. Sixteen percent indicated that good communication skills—written and oral—are essential for the role.

One respondent indicated, “Those who seek to work in [outpatient pharmacy] must be able to communicate effectively with patients and allied health care providers alike.” Another stated that students should “be open-minded to the types of environments that they work in.”

Adapted from the American Pharmacists Association