

Pharmaceutical Industry Sales and Marketing

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.”

Critical Factor Ratings

Interaction With People

Interaction with people was cited by these sales and marketing pharmacists as a low mid-range critical factor. The interactions they have tend to be with colleagues and other health care professionals as noted in those critical factors.

= 4.0



Conducting Physical Assessments

Conducting physical assessments was tied as the lowest critical factor rating by this group. This makes sense because there is limited opportunity to work directly with patients.

= 1.5



Interpreting Laboratory Values

Similar to conducting physical assessments, interpreting laboratory values was tied for the lowest-rated critical factor. Again, there is limited opportunity for the pharmacists to gain access to these types of data.

= 1.5



Continuity of Relationships

The extent to which these respondents have ongoing or long-term relationships vary by company, however many of the relationships they build are ongoing.

= 7.6



Helping People

As noted earlier in the profile, 27% of the respondents feel that they impact patients somewhat; the majority of the impact is indirect. One respondent summed this up nicely with the statement, "Opportunity to impact the lives of millions globally with innovative medicines we market that were developed through our R&D."

= 3.2



Collaboration With Other Professionals

Sales and marketing respondents are in the mid-range regarding collaboration with other professionals. This was one of the appealing aspects of the role.

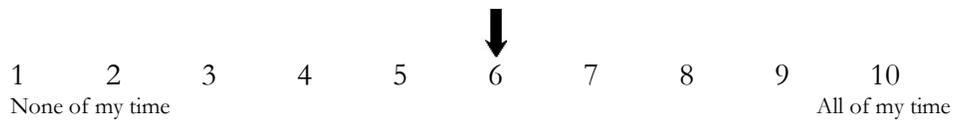
= 6.6



Educating Other Professionals

Pharmacist respondents spend time educating other health professionals. The response was mid-range for this critical factor. As a group, they spend 7% of their time in a teaching and education mode.

= 6.0



Variety of Daily Activities

The day-to-day workload often depends on the company and the administrative process they follow. Nine percent of the respondents indicated that this was an appealing aspect of their work.

= 7.8



Multiple Task Handling

There was fairly good agreement among sales and marketing pharmacists that they deal with more than one task at a time as seen by the high-range level response.

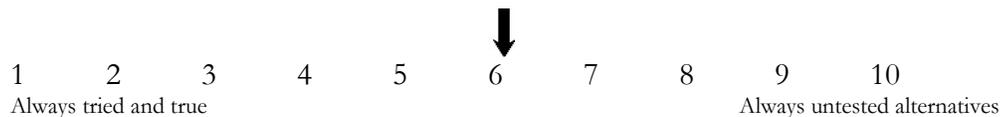
= 8.3



Problem Solving

Pharmacists responding to the survey indicated that they are mid-range for this critical factor. One respondent stated liking the “opportunity to be involved in strategy development and solving business-related problems for pharmaceutical companies.”

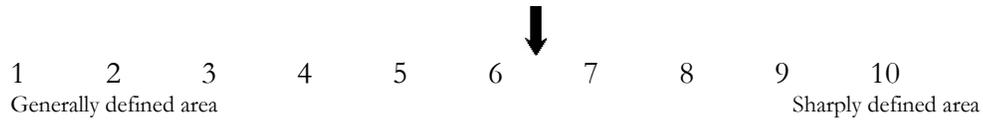
= 6.1



Focus of Expertise

Respondents indicated that they are mid-range revealing that they use both general knowledge and at times sharply defined knowledge for a given project.

= 6.4



Innovative Thinking

Some settings are well established and have highly defined expectations, duties, and responsibilities, whereas others will require innovative thinking to help shape and define the practice. Respondents tended toward the innovative thinking side of this critical factor.

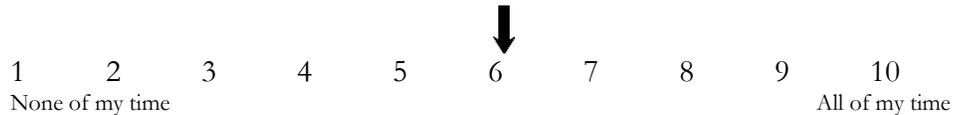
= 7.6



Applying Scientific Knowledge

Sales and marketing pharmacists apply their scientific knowledge during certain functions of the role yielding a rating of 6.1.

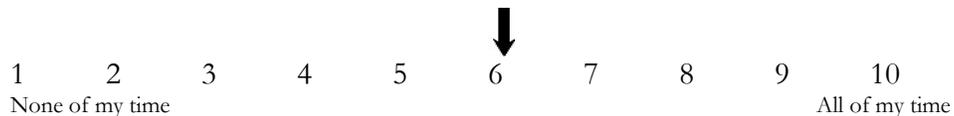
= 6.1



Applying Medical Knowledge

Similar to applying scientific knowledge, these pharmacists indicated that applying medical knowledge in their field is mid-range.

= 6.1



Creating New Knowledge by Conducting Research

There is little opportunity to conduct research for these professionals. They indicated that they spend 1% of their time on research activities.

= 3.7



Management/Supervision of Others

A low mid-range response from participants shows that this group is not very involved in the management and supervisory responsibilities of others conducted at their company. Respondents indicated they spend approximately 3% of their time in this role.

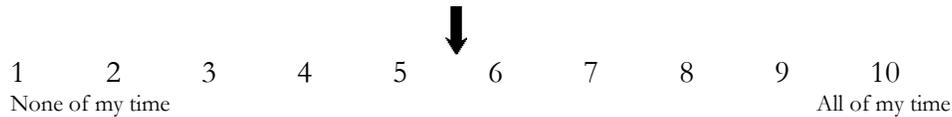
= 4.4



Management/Supervision of a Business

The respondents indicated that they spend 34% of their time managing the business. In addition, respondents indicated that they spend 13% on project management roles.

= 5.6



Pressure/Stress

Respondents indicated that they experience pressure/stress at the mid-range level. All pharmacists experience some stress in their workday, which comes with responsibility. The types of pressures and stresses vary depending upon the practice environment. When providing some insights, a respondent mentioned working at a “hectic pace, and are deadline driven.”

= 7.0



Work Schedule

These pharmacists often work regular and predictable schedules. However, based on project deadlines or needs of the organization, they sometimes have unpredictable and long hours.

= 4.9



Part-Time Opportunities

Part-time opportunities are limited in this area. This was the third lowest-rated critical factor for this profile.

= 2.3



Job-Sharing Opportunities

Job sharing is not a common practice in this field as reinforced by the low range rating of this factor at 3.1.

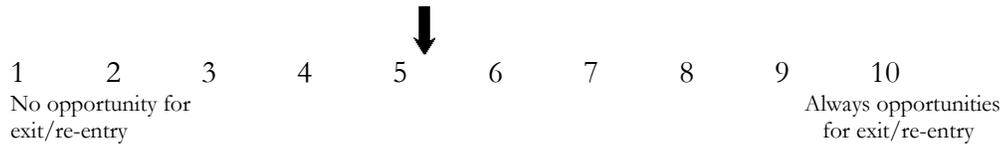
= 3.1



Exit/Re-entry Opportunities

Exit/re-entry opportunities are more available in this area compared with job sharing or part-time opportunities.

= 5.2



Parental Leave Opportunities

Parental leave was rated as a high-range critical factor. The pharmaceutical industry historically has been known for its generous benefits package for employees.

= 8.1



Leisure/Family Time

Respondents indicated that they have ample time for family and leisure activities. Considering the majority feel that their work schedule is predictable, it makes sense that they can plan for their own time.

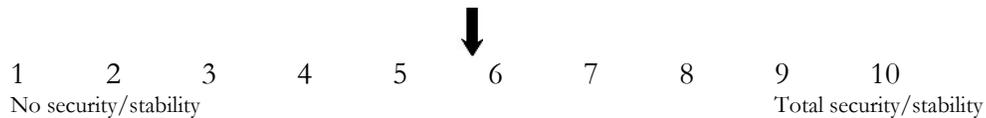
= 7.2



Job Security

As the health system continues to change, increased pressures for accountability across all sectors of the industry lead to this factor being mid-range at 5.8.

= 5.8



Opportunities for Advancement

The respondents in sales and marketing in the industry indicate that there are opportunities for advancement by rating this factor at 7.2.

= 7.2



Opportunities for Leadership Development

Opportunities for leadership development was the third highest-rated critical factor for this profile, scoring in the high range at 8.5.

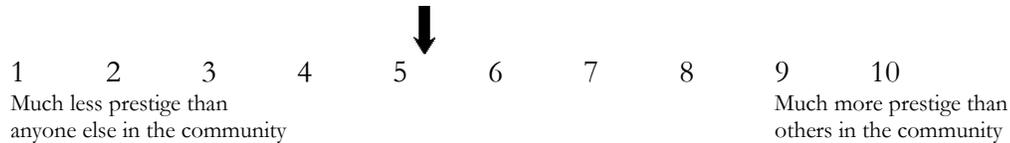
= 8.5



Community Prestige

Pharmacists are well-respected health professionals. The extent to which their practice directly influences their prestige in the community depends on the visibility of their role to the general public.

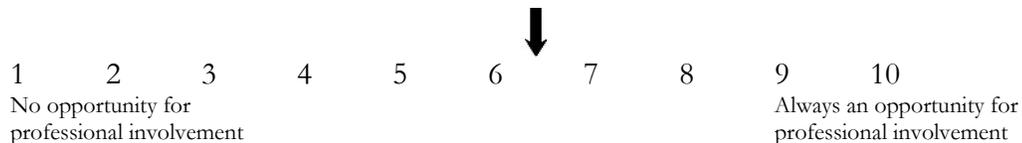
= 5.2



Professional Involvement

Active involvement in pharmacy meetings and events creates opportunities for professional development and the sharing of ideas and knowledge among peers. The extent to which a pharmacist gets involved is largely a personal decision.

= 6.3



Income

Pharmacist salaries have increased significantly in the recent past, largely as a result of the pharmacist shortage. With 67% of the respondents having an income of at least \$150,000, they feel properly compensated.

= 7.9



Benefits (vacation, health, retirement)

Benefits were listed as the highest-rated critical factor by this group. As noted earlier, the pharmaceutical historically has very generous benefits packages for employees. Considering that the sales and marketing respondents scored this as 9.2, they believe they have excellent benefits.

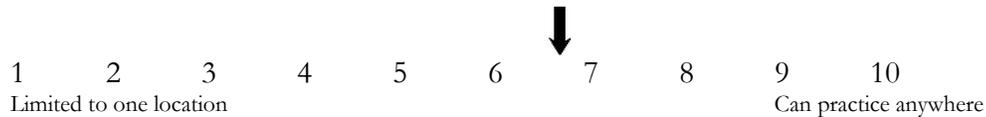
= 9.2



Geographic Location

The pharmacist’s role, in either sales or marketing, can have an impact on geographic location. Because of the numbers of companies in the pharmaceutical industry, there are numerous locations across the United States with pockets of a heavy industry presence.

= 6.7



Working Remotely

Similar to their location, the respondent’s ability to work remotely will depend on the specific role. However, there are opportunities to work remotely.

= 7.8



Autonomy

As a licensed professional, pharmacists have been granted certain authorities and accepted certain responsibilities; as a result, pharmacists generally have autonomy within the professional scope of practice. Pharmacists in this setting indicated a mid-range rating of 7.3 for this factor.

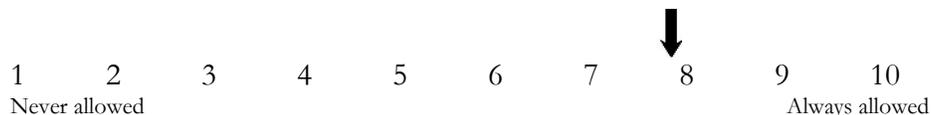
= 7.3



Self-Worth

Pharmacists practicing in pharmaceutical sales and marketing are often pursuing careers that fulfill personal and professional ideals. There is general agreement among these pharmacists that their practice creates self-worth.

= 7.9



Mean Scores for Critical Factors

1. Interaction With People	4.0
2. Performing Physical Assessments	1.5
3. Interpreting Laboratory Values	1.5
4. Continuity of Relationships	7.6
5. Helping People	3.2
6. Collaboration With Other Professionals	6.6
7. Educating Other Professionals	6.0
8. Variety of Daily Activities	7.8
9. Multiple Task Handling	8.3
10. Problem Solving	6.1
11. Focus of Expertise	6.4
12. Innovative Thinking	7.6
13. Applying Scientific Knowledge	6.1
14. Applying Medical Knowledge	6.1
15. Creating New Knowledge by Conducting Research	3.7
16. Management/Supervision of Others	4.4
17. Management/Supervision of a Business	5.6
18. Pressure/Stress	7.0
19. Work Schedule	4.9
20. Part-Time Opportunities	2.3
21. Job-Sharing Opportunities	3.1
22. Exit/Re-entry Opportunities	5.2
23. Parental Leave Opportunities	8.1
24. Leisure/Family Time	7.2
25. Job Security	5.8
26. Opportunities for Advancement	7.2
27. Opportunities for Leadership Development	8.5
28. Community Prestige	5.2
29. Professional Involvement	6.3
30. Income	7.9
31. Benefits (vacation, health, retirement)	9.2
32. Geographic Location	6.7
33. Working Remotely	7.8
34. Autonomy	7.3
35. Self-Worth	7.9
36. Future Focus	7.9
37. Professional Prestige	4.8
38. Unique Practice Environment	7.0
39. Advanced Degree	5.6
40. Entrepreneurial Opportunity	5.3
41. Additional Training	6.5
42. Interacting With Colleagues	8.6
43. Travel	5.4
44. Writing	4.1
45. Working With Teams	6.5

References

MedicalRepresentative.net. How Does the 2009 PhRMA Code of Ethics Affect Medical Reps? Available at: <http://www.medicalrepresentative.net/how-does-the-2009-phrma-code-of-ethics-affect-medical-reps/>

PhRMA—Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers of America. Available at: <http://www.phrma.org>

Schommer JC, Brown LM, Sogol EM. *Career Pathway Evaluation Program 2012 Pharmacist Profile Survey*. June 2012.

Professional Organizations

American Pharmacists Association (APhA)

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www.pharmacist.com

American Society of Health-System Pharmacists (ASHP)

7272 Wisconsin Avenue, Bethesda, MD 20814

Tel: 301-657-3000

www.ashp.org

National Community Pharmacists Association (NCPA)

100 Daingerfield Road, Alexandria, VA 22314

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www.ncpanet.org

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