



PHARMACISTS

JOB DESCRIPTION

Pharmacists distribute drugs prescribed by physicians and other health practitioners and provide information to patients about medications and their use. They advise physicians and other health practitioners on the selection, dosages, interactions, and side effects of medications. Pharmacists also monitor the health and progress of patients in response to drug therapy to ensure the safe and effective use of medication. Pharmacists must understand the use, clinical effects, and composition of drugs, including their chemical, biological, and physical properties. Compounding—the actual mixing of ingredients to form powders, tablets, capsules, ointments, and solutions—is a small part of a pharmacist’s practice, because most medicines are produced by pharmaceutical companies in a standard dosage and drug delivery form. Most pharmacists work in a community setting, such as a retail drugstore, or in a health care facility, such as a hospital, nursing home, mental health institution, or neighborhood health clinic.

EXPERIENCE & SKILLS

Prospective pharmacists should have scientific aptitude, good communication skills, and a desire to help others. They also must be conscientious and pay close attention to detail, because the decisions they make affect human lives.

EDUCATION & TRAINING

A license to practice pharmacy is required in all States, the District of Columbia, and all U.S. territories. To obtain a license, the prospective pharmacist must graduate from a college of pharmacy that is accredited by the Accreditation Council for Pharmacy Education (ACPE) and pass an examination. All States require the North American Pharmacist Licensure Exam (NAPLEX), which tests pharmacy skills and knowledge, and 43 states and the District of Columbia require the Multistate Pharmacy Jurisprudence Exam (MPJE), which tests pharmacy law. Both exams are administered by the National Association of Boards of Pharmacy. Pharmacists in the eight states that do not require the MJPE must pass a state-specific exam that is similar to the MJPE. In addition to the NAPLEX and MPJE, some States require additional exams unique to their State. All States except California currently grant a license without extensive reexamination to qualified pharmacists who already are licensed by another State. In Florida, reexamination is not required if a pharmacist has passed the NAPLEX and MPJE within 12 years of his or her application for a license transfer. Many pharmacists are licensed to practice in more than one State. Most States require continuing education for license renewal.

SALARIES

Entry level: \$70,000
Average: \$84,900

Drug Stores: \$85,380
Hospitals: \$84,560

Grocery Stores: \$85,680
Other stores: \$84,170

EMPLOYMENT & ADVANCEMENT PROSPECTS

Very good employment opportunities are expected for pharmacists over the 2004–14 period because the number of job openings created by employment growth and the need to replace pharmacists who leave the occupation or retire are expected to exceed the number of degrees granted in pharmacy. Enrollments in pharmacy programs are rising as more students are attracted by high salaries and good job prospects. Despite this increase in enrollments, job openings should still be more numerous than those seeking employment.

RELATED OCCUPATIONS

- Pharmacy Technicians
- Pharmacy Aides
- Physicians & Surgeons
- Biological/Medical Scientists
- Chemists and Materials Scientists.

REFERENCES

American Association of Colleges of Pharmacy, 1426 Prince St., Alexandria, VA 22314. Internet:

<http://www.aacp.org>

American Society of Health-System Pharmacists, 7272 Wisconsin Ave., Bethesda, MD 20814. Internet:

<http://www.ashp.org>

Academy of Managed Care Pharmacy, 100 North Pitt St., Suite 400, Alexandria, VA 22314. Internet:

<http://www.amcp.org>

American Pharmacists Association, 2215 Constitution Ave. N.W., Washington, DC 20037-2985. Internet:

<http://www.aphanet.org>