

Community Pharmacy: Chain

Ask a chain community pharmacist what he or she likes most about their job, and you're likely to hear, "**it's all about people.**" From helping with aches and pains, to educating patients about sophisticated drug therapies, to helping sick patients cope with their feelings... pharmacists forge relationships with their patients. For more than 22 years, pharmacists have ranked at or near the top of the Gallup Poll ranking of the "most trusted professionals." For many Americans, their pharmacist is their primary source of health information – the health care professional who is readily accessible and easily approachable. The pharmacy is often the first place patients go for questions about medicine and their health.

The Right Stuff

If you're a "people person" with strong interpersonal and verbal communication skills, chain community pharmacy may be for you. It's a fast-paced environment, requiring intense focus, organization, and efficiency. The ability to communicate on many levels is key: scientifically with health professionals and simply for patients. As the field of pharmacy evolves and pharmacists play a more active role in counseling and medications therapy, chain community pharmacists will enjoy even more prestige, financial rewards and respect. Starting salaries are as high as \$75,000 a year, with potential for growth.

Patient Care Opportunities

While some chain community pharmacists are content with the traditional role of dispensing medication and educating patients, others choose more. Today, thousands of chain community pharmacists are certified to vaccinate patients against influenza and pneumonia and many are also earning nationally-recognized credentials in pharmacy disease state management in areas covering diabetes, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, and anticoagulation therapy. They also have many other patient care opportunities, including smoking cessation programs, compounding specialties, herbal and other alternative drug therapies, and screening programs such as those to detect osteoporosis and high cholesterol. Pharmacists are helping patients take a more active role in their health.

Opportunities Beyond the Counter... Management in Chain Pharmacy

A career in chain pharmacy can lead to a challenging management position for those interested in combining their pharmacy expertise with business skills. Many chains offer career paths that take pharmacists from the store level to regional, district, and corporate level positions. Pharmacists occupy positions in the development of patient care programs, pharmacist recruiting, pharmacist and technician training, pharmacy operations, pharmaceutical buying, professional and legal affairs, and other varying levels of management.

Education and Life-Long Learning

Pharmacy programs offered by colleges and universities require four years of professional study, following the completion of at least two years of preprofessional study. Pharmacy offers the opportunity for life-long learning through continuing education programs designed specifically for pharmacists— chain pharmacy affords its professionals the resources and opportunities to make learning and professional development part of the job. Advanced formal education beyond a

pharmacy degree is not required, although all pharmacists are required by the board of pharmacy to complete continuing education to keep them up-to-date on their medication and therapeutic knowledge.

The number of community pharmacy practice residency programs has risen in recent years in the chain pharmacy setting, offering pharmacy graduates a one-year comprehensive experience in community pharmacy with opportunities to develop pharmacy services to enhance patient care and to expand the resident's management skills. The resident works closely with a residency director and one or more pharmacist preceptors who will assist in development and implementation of the resident's projects and patient care initiatives.

Demand for Chain Community Pharmacists

Due mainly to an aging population and a healthcare system increasingly reliant on medication therapy, annual outpatient prescription volume in 1999 increased to over three billion prescriptions... up 50% from just over two billion in 1992. By 2005 that volume is expected to exceed four billion. Meanwhile, the number of community pharmacists in the United States is expected to remain relatively constant, increasing about 7% by 2005. This makes demand for community pharmacists higher than ever. Currently, all states have at least some shortage of pharmacists, some quite severe, and demand is expected to intensify as this volume trend continues.