The Perceptions of Pharmacy Students and Recent Graduates

HISTORY
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SYNOPSIS
There are over 4,000 students enrolled in Pharmacy schools across Canada, with an average of about 970 graduates per year joining the already existing 17,000+ pharmacists in Canada.

With each new pharmacy student and new pharmacist comes a variety of motivational factors, fueled by their perceptions of the profession of Pharmacy. This Teva CFP report takes a look at some of these perceptions and resulting expectations that accompany pharmacy students as they graduate, and how these perceptions may impact their career within their chosen profession.

ADVISORY BOARD
We would like to thank the following members of the Advisory Board for their participation and support.

Zubin Austin  University of Toronto
Michel Caron  Uniprix
Anne-Marie Ford  Preceptor
Frank Kwiecien  Loblaw Companies
Nadine Lacasse  Recent Graduate, Past CAPSI council
Keith Lee  London Drugs
Dean Miller  Shoppers Drug Mart
Larry Shipp  Canadian Foundation for Pharmacy
Adam Somers  Canadian Association of Pharmacy Students and Interns (CAPSI)
Survey Methodology & Results

Methodology
After meeting with the Advisory Board, our research team, along with Ipsos-Reid, developed two separate surveys. One survey targeted existing pharmacy students and the other targeted pharmacists who graduated within the last 5 years. The 45-question bilingual surveys were available online and completed via the internet from November 2005 through to February 2006.

Advertisements were placed in the Ontario College of Pharmacists November / December issue of Pharmacy Connection and in the Pharmacy Student Career Guide in Pharmacy Practice inviting pharmacy students and recent graduates to log on and fill out the web-based survey.

Results
For the pharmacy students, the survey sample (n) was 1498, or 37% of all Canadian pharmacy students, with all institutions and all years being represented.

The survey sample for recent graduates was 448, or 9.2% of the total graduate pool.

Survey participation by pharmacy students was 4 times that of recent graduates indicating that the further removed from school, the lower the access and participation of respondents.

In some cases in this publication, only the most popular responses are reported.

Additional advertisements and invitations to promote the survey included:
- internal memos
- bulletins
- emails
- journals (CPJ, L’Actualité)
- web invitations (Teva, OCP)
- mailings from retail head offices
- and more
Pharmacy Students
The journey begins.

There are several reasons why Canadian students would choose to study in the field of pharmacy. The majority of pharmacy students undertake this profession for a noble, altruistic purpose – to help people. Job stability, as well as the ease of finding employment whether regionally, nationally, or globally, were two other key factors influencing their decision.

How important were each of the following factors in leading you to choose pharmacy?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RANK</th>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Wanted to help people</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Is a stable job (wouldn’t have to worry about being unemployed)</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Would be able to work wherever I wanted</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Would be able to make a good income</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Is a profession that people respect</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Good alternative to other health professions</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

STUDENT SURVEY
Base: All pharmacy students who rated these factors as “very important” or “somewhat important”. Chart illustrates the top 6 answers out of a possible 14. (n = 1498)
Although the majority of all pharmacy students feel they have the knowledge and skills to practice pharmacy, there is an inverse relationship between the year of study and the feeling of preparedness. The majority (73%) of first year students were confident they would have most of the necessary knowledge and expertise to become skilled pharmacists. This number drops significantly amongst fourth year students to 54%, showing the need for continuing education amid future pharmacists.
Once you have graduated, do you think you will stay in the city where you are currently studying pharmacy or move to another community?

There’s no place like home. Or is there?

The majority of students attending smaller schools were more willing to move to another community to practice pharmacy. It was discovered that the opposite held true for students attending larger institutions. Only one school (University of Manitoba) differed from this pattern. Although smaller, only 1 in 2 students was willing to relocate. Reasons for this irregularity may be attributed to the popularity of internet pharmacies.
It was discovered that of the 62% of students who responded in favor of relocating to practice pharmacy, there was a relatively even preference to working in small towns, mid-sized cities and large urban centres. However, at a provincial level there were some significant differences. Students in the provinces of Ontario and Quebec preferred to work in smaller towns. Conversely, the students in Western Canada had a preference to find employment in larger urban settings. The students residing in Eastern Canada, more specifically the third and fourth year undergrads, seemed to prefer to work in rural areas.

**STUDENT SURVEY**

*Base: All pharmacy students who “definitely will”, “probably will”, or “might or might not” work as a pharmacist after graduation (n = 1485)*

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**Settling down.**
If given the opportunity to select their ideal working environment, the majority (72%) of pharmacy students would choose to work in a retail environment. According to the National Association of Pharmacy Regulatory Authorities (NAPRA) reports from January 2005, 73% of all employed pharmacists currently work in a retail environment.

Upon further researching this desire to work in a retail setting, it was found that the majority preferred to work for a chain store pharmacy, followed by a banner pharmacy, a grocery setting and finally an independent pharmacy. Interest in working in a grocery store pharmacy increases significantly in the fourth year, where interest in working at an independent declines. This was not the case in Quebec.
Motivating factors.

When asked what were important factors in determining where students choose to work, the results showed that practicing patient-focused care was the number one reason, followed by working in a team atmosphere. Breaking down these results even further, females placed more emphasis on these factors than their male counterparts. Male respondents were more interested in the business of pharmacy, particularly compensation and benefits as well as advancement opportunities.

When the responses were broken down regionally, more Ontarians selected compensation, benefits and advancement opportunities as important factors. The professional image of the pharmacy was the most important to 12% of Quebec pharmacy students versus 5% of the overall respondents.
When asked what salaries students expected, the answers varied regionally. Ontario students’ expectations were the highest, while students from Atlantic Canada came in at the lowest. In a breakdown by institution, University of Manitoba students expected the highest hourly wages.

Pharmacy students were more interested in long-term benefits such as pension plans. Not surprisingly, female students were more interested in receiving maternity benefits than their male counterparts.
Recent Graduates
Which one of these pharmacy factors were the most important to recent graduates?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Male</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Opportunity to practice patient-focused care</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Team atmosphere</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality of pharmacy technicians</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good compensation and benefits</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reasonable shift hours</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunity for advancement</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management style</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional image of the pharmacy</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of pharmacy technicians</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**GRADUATE SURVEY**

*Base: All pharmacy graduates working as pharmacists (n=448)*

When graduates were asked the question of what factors were important to them, the number one response was patient-focused care – the same as pharmacy students. Pharmacists in the role of owners or managers were more likely to say that a team oriented atmosphere was very important.

When the responses were broken down regionally, graduates in Ontario chose the quality of pharmacy technicians as something they felt was most important. In Quebec, however, the importance of a team atmosphere ranked number one, with patient-focused care ranking second.

Interestingly, the professional image of the pharmacy in Quebec scored high marks with graduates – which corresponds with the opinions received from pharmacy students in Quebec.

There was also one major difference in responses between graduates and students: graduates ranked quality of pharmacy technicians as their third most important factor, while students did not even rank this as one of their top six choices.

The only significant gender-specific difference seen was that males listed the opportunity for advancement as 10 times more important than females.
Which of these services should be part of the basic service provided by a pharmacist, versus being an extra service for an additional fee?

- Follow up with customers to ensure the medication is working: 88% Basic, 12% Extra
- Preparation of specialized doses (e.g. filling syringes/pill cutting): 53% Basic, 47% Extra
- Conducting a thorough review of a customer’s medication file: 48% Basic, 52% Extra
- Educational community seminars on prevention health care and handling common health ailments: 31% Basic, 69% Extra
- Provision of health care books and health-related videos: 20% Basic, 80% Extra
- A private half-hour or drug therapy consultation: 8% Basic, 92% Extra

GRADUATE SURVEY
Base: All pharmacy graduates working as pharmacists (n=448)

When asked which services they felt should be included under basic dispensing fees, the majority of pharmacists agreed that follow up care should be covered under basic fees. The results also showed that the majority felt private consultations, educational community seminars and the supplying of health care books and health-related videos should be considered extra services warranting an additional fee. The areas where our respondents were divided are conducting thorough medication reviews and preparing specialized doses, where half felt these services were basic and the other half felt these were added services.
When asked if they felt they were spending enough time with their patients, 52% of recent pharmacy graduates polled felt they were not. There were several reasons why pharmacists felt they were not spending enough time with their customers, with the number one reason being too much time was spent on dispensing functions.
There were a variety of things that pharmacists would change if they had the opportunity to do so. Although the advisory board tried to predict all the possible issues that pharmacists might want to change, there is no one issue that stands out. ‘Something else’ had the majority of the votes, yet ‘the people’ (25%) was the clear issue among dissatisfied pharmacists.
Striking the balance.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Benefit</th>
<th>Interest (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Paid licensing and association fees</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retirement packages</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Premium pay for evening, weekend, holiday shifts</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maternity / paternity benefits</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continuing education</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**GRADUATE SURVEY**

*Base:* All pharmacy graduates who responded “extremely interested” and “very interested” to these alternative benefits (n=448)

Chart illustrates the top 5 answers out of a possible 16.

When we looked at responses from graduates, in general they preferred incentives that covered benefits such as licensing and association fees. Although this was the top choice for graduates, this did not make it into the top five preferred incentives for pharmacy students.
Moving on.

A high percentage of new pharmacists are considering leaving their current job. Of that percentage, almost half were planning to do so within the year. Regional breakdown shows that Ontario pharmacists are more likely to consider leaving their current job at 68%, and Quebec pharmacists least likely at 43%, versus the national average of 58%. Eastern Canada falls in at number two with 64% and Western Canada at 58% very or somewhat likely to leave.
Relationship problems with management is the main cause for new graduates to find employment elsewhere. This may not be a surprise considering human resources and management courses are not a standard among all pharmacy faculties or upon entry into the workforce.

**What was the contributing factor for leaving or considering leaving a job in pharmacy?**

- **Relationship with management**: 16%
- **Personal issues (maternity leave, etc.)**: 12%
- **Just wanted to do something different**: 10%
- **What was promised wasn’t delivered**: 6%
- **Compensation**: 5%
- **Admin. tasks limit time for patient care**: 5%
- **To open your own store**: 5%

**GRADUATE SURVEY**
Base: All pharmacy graduates who have left / considering leaving a job in pharmacy (n=263)
Chart illustrates the top 7 answers out of a possible 23.
Some food for thought.

### What are they thinking?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Strongly Agree or Somewhat Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pharmacists and other employees want to stay long-term</td>
<td>62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I want to own my own store someday</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cash register needs to be moved out of the dispensary</td>
<td>73%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consumers have difficulty knowing which person behind the counter is the pharmacist</td>
<td>72%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I’d be happier if my techs were certified</td>
<td>63%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**GRADUATE SURVEY**

Base: All pharmacy graduates (n=448)

*5 - Point scale: Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (5)*

Results show that 39% of all graduates, and 56% of male pharmacists, would like to own a store someday. 72% of pharmacists surveyed felt that the consumers have difficulty identifying which person behind the counter was the actual pharmacist or the pharmacy technician. A number of pharmacists surveyed also stated they would prefer if their technicians were certified. This statement held particularly true in Ontario, Western Canada and for dissatisfied pharmacists.
Graduating pharmacists have all the right reasons to look forward to their new professional careers. Their expectations of the profession, however, may not be an accurate reflection of the reality that lies ahead of them. Reasons for entering this profession, such as the opportunity to help people, are often lost to increasing demands on dispensing functions and administrative duties. The reality is that most pharmacists spend less time than they would like with their patients.

New pharmacists will play an important role in shaping the future of this profession. They will have an opportunity to bring their personal need for continued education and patient programs to the forefront of their profession and revolutionize the role that pharmacists play in our health care system. Most graduates recognize the added services that pharmacists offer to patients, such as private drug therapy consultations and educational seminars, should be adequately funded and are valuable contributions to the health of Canadian patients. They are eager to practice more patient-focused care and are quick to recognize the important contribution that pharmacy technicians bring to the profession of pharmacy.

The successful recruitment of today’s new pharmacists will greatly depend on the philosophy of each pharmacy, where promoting a team environment and working more closely with patients are more important than advancement opportunities. While some recruitment expectations remain constant – like maintaining competitive wages and seeking alternative benefit packages – there are challenges to the long-term retention of pharmacists. For example, four out of every five new pharmacists are satisfied with being a pharmacist, yet more than half are likely to leave their current place of employment, citing relationship with management as the main contributing factor.

The Teva CFP Report continues to pursue the many interesting facets of this profession and deliver current and relevant information to Canadian pharmacists. We hope you find value in this year’s study and we look forward to your feedback as we continue to research the diverse perceptions and opinions of our key stakeholders.

Regards,

The Teva CFP Report Research Team
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