



APhA

Career Pathways
Program

Briefing Document



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American Pharmacists Association
8th Edition



Instructions

Please complete the exercises in this **Briefing Document** before attending the live workshop. The assignment should require less than an hour of your time, but it is critical to the success of the workshop and sets the baseline for your individual career planning efforts.

Introduction

The ongoing evolution in the delivery of health care creates unprecedented challenges for the profession of pharmacy. Today's pharmacists need to be technically competent as well as clinically competent caring professionals capable of effectively monitoring and providing cognitive services for many therapeutic health parameters. The exciting part of all of this is that you, as a student pharmacist, have great opportunities to develop and practice your skills for the benefit of the patient in more ways than ever before.

Individuals who carefully plan their career strategies will do well against tough competition in employment markets and will achieve greater personal and professional satisfaction with their career selections. The market for pharmacists continues to move forward for those who have a good understanding of their own skills and how they can apply those skills in different environments.

Many student pharmacists graduate with exposure to very few of the career options available to them. To make a sound career decision, you need knowledge about two important subjects: the pharmacy profession and you. After working through the exercises in this document and participating in the workshop of the APhA Career Pathways Program, you will not only have detailed and useful information on many areas of pharmacy in which to practice but also have a clearer understanding of how to choose a career path in pharmacy that is appropriate for you. In addition, you will gain insight into the tools that you can leverage as you move through your career path.

APhA Career Pathways Program

The Career Pathway Evaluation Program for Pharmacy Professionals was originally developed in 1988 by Glaxo Inc. (currently GSK), a major U.S. pharmaceutical company, as part of its continuing commitment to health care education. In 2000, APhA acquired the program to enable continued access for the pharmacy profession. In 2007, APhA contracted with several research scientists to update the program's research.

To keep the program up to date, the program was reevaluated in 2024 with new information collected with a national survey and rebranded as the APhA Career Pathways Program. In addition, all program documents and exercises were evaluated and updated to meet today's career needs.



Program components

The **APhA Career Pathways Program** consists of three key components:

1. Self-assessment exercises and an online assessment tool available at www.pharmacist.com/career/career-pathways.
2. A workshop that focuses on a five-step decision-making process.
3. Resource materials and follow-up information.

What is in it for you?

The purpose of the **APhA Career Pathways Program** is to provide you with a process and initial resources for making informed career decisions. The program provides information and guidelines you will need to carry out this process. It is not a “quick fix” that will enable you to reach a career decision by the end of the workshop nor is it a substitute for your own research. However, it can help you identify a pharmacy career option/path that is appropriate for you through the understanding of specific factors that are important to you in a position.

Assignment

This **Briefing Document** contains some basic concepts and exercises that will prepare you for the workshop. Exercises should require less than an hour of your time and will give you a good start on a decision-making process that should prove extremely helpful in the long-term. While an hour may seem like a long time to some, this actually provides the foundation for career exploration and career growth moving forward.

There are no right or wrong answers to these exercises. If you are planning to participate in a live workshop, please bring this document with you. The rating of critical factors in Exercise 5 can be completed online at www.pharmacist.com/career/career-pathways.

Decision-making model

The basic decision-making model outlined below provides the framework for the APhA Career Pathways Program. The model shows what steps are needed to be a vigilant decision maker. The vigilant decision maker is alert, thorough, open, and persistent in looking at and evaluating different possibilities. This includes your documenting the pros and cons of your experiential experiences and perhaps any work experience you have had in pharmacy.

Please study the model and the explanatory paragraphs about the model:

The Vigilant Decision-Making Process

Step I. Appraising the challenge

- Determine the importance of informed decision making.
- Acknowledge the consequences of making a “passive decision.”
- Can you decide on your first role without actually seeing the environment?

Step II. Assessing yourself

- Conduct a thorough self-analysis; assess your goals, values, strengths, skills, interests, and preferences.
- Who else is important to talk with about your self-assessment?

Step III. Surveying alternatives

- Explore a wide range of alternatives.
- Especially those that you never heard about.

Step IV. Evaluating alternatives

- Search for new information.
- Take account of added information, even if it does not support the course of action you initially preferred.
- Match your self-assessment with career options.
- Consider both positive and negative consequences of all alternatives.

Step V. Achieving commitment

- Decide the best course of action, including a contingency plan in case your first choice does not work out.
- Analyze both short- and long-term career goals.

The Vigilant Decision-Making Process

Step I. Appraising the challenge

Your first step is to recognize the importance of taking an active role in making career decisions, rather than just assuming things will work out or attending job fairs at our school without ever visiting the environment you may be interested in. You also should recognize the difficulty of thoughtful career decision making, including the amount of time needed to do it well. Problems occur when you underestimate the demands of the task or postpone tackling it out of reluctance to look at the issues involved.

Step II. Assessing yourself

Good career decisions require an unusual degree of self-knowledge. For many people, self-examination is the hardest part of the decision-making task. But you must understand what your goals, values, strengths, interests, and abilities are if you are going to make the career decision that is right for you. Too many people today take a “job”—remember, as a student, you are looking for the first step in your career, the path to professional success and personal fulfillment.

Step III. Surveying alternatives

Because there are a lot of career paths to choose from, you may be tempted to rule out options right from the start. You may feel you do not have the time, energy, or resources to review them all, or you may feel you already know what you want to do. But you might overlook an exciting possibility if you are not sufficiently active and open at this step.

Step IV. Evaluating alternatives

In many ways, this is the heart of the matter: matching your preferences and priorities to the options attractive to you. The challenge is to remain open and objective even when what you discover about a given career—or about yourself—runs counter to your expectations. This part of the decision-making process requires an ongoing effort—you may well have to revisit steps II and III.

Step V. Achieving commitment

After all the relevant factors have been identified, explored, and weighed, you must reach a conclusion—the decision to take that first step in your career. Part of the challenge of this stage is that you must use both intuitive as well as analytic thought. You should also consider alternatives should your first choice not be available at the time you are looking.



Exercise 1: What led you to pharmacy?

In the space below, indicate your professional and/or personal goals, interests, and other factors that led you to the profession of pharmacy.

Goals: (what the profession of pharmacy will enable you to accomplish—personally and professionally)

Interests: (what personally attracted you to the profession of pharmacy)

Other factors: (any other factors that led you to the profession of pharmacy)

Exercise 2: What are your career options?

Use the **Career Options for Pharmacists** on pages BD-7-9 to orient your thinking about career options for you. The chart is designed to depict the major categories and environments with a reasonable level of detail.

Where the same career option exists in more than one environment (e.g., clinical/cardiology), it is repeated on the chart. In other instances, where an option more typically pertains to one environment (e.g., pharmaceutical industry), it has been listed in the area where it is usually found.

Instructions: When you have reviewed the **Career Options for Pharmacists**, list the options in one of the following three columns on page BD-10:

Understand: Career options you know enough about to either consider or reject as possible career options for you. Consider how much of the daily routine you actually know. Do you know much time is spent on direct or indirect patient care versus administrative responsibilities?

Aware: Career options you may be aware of superficially but know too little about to reject or consider as career options.

New career option: Career options that have been introduced to you on the chart.

Career Options for Pharmacists

Academia

- | | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| • Administration | • Pharmacogenetics |
| • Biological sciences | • Pharmacognosy |
| • Clinical* | • Pharmacology |
| • Continuing education | • Pharmacy practice |
| • Experiential education | • Professor/lecturer |
| • Medicinal chemistry | • Residency/fellowship coordinator |
| • Pharmaceutics | • Social and administrative sciences |

Ambulatory Care

- | | |
|-------------------------|--------------------------|
| • Clinical* | • Physician office-based |
| • Home infusion | • Specialty services |
| • Infusion and oncology | • Thrombosis/hemostasis |

Association Management

- | | |
|--|----------------------------------|
| • Accreditation/certification | • Continuing education |
| • Advocacy/government affairs | • Legislative/regulatory affairs |
| • Administration/leadership/membership | • Practice development |

Community

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|-------------------------|
| • Chain/mass-merchant/supermarket | • Independent |
| • Clinical* | • Home health care |
| • Compounding | • Home health equipment |
| • Corporate/administration | • Transitions of care |

Consultant

- | | |
|----------------------------|---|
| • Clinical* | • Long-term/skilled nursing facility care |
| • Home health care | • Project/education management |
| • Hospice/palliative care | • Senior care/geriatric |
| • Legal/regulatory advisor | • Transitions of care |

Career Options for Pharmacists (continued)

Federal/Government

- | | |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ) • Board of Pharmacy • Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) • Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) • Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) • Department of Veteran Affairs (VA) • Department of War (armed services) • Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) • Federal Bureau of Prisons • Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) • Indian Health Service (IHS) • National Institutes of Health (NIH) • State/local health clinic • State/local department of public health • State Medicaid agency • Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) • U.S. Coast Guard • U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) • U.S. Public Health Service (PHS) |
|---|---|

Health System

- | | |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Administration/leadership • Analytics/informatics • Clinical* • Clinical patient research • Contracting/340B program • In-patient/hospital/medical center | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inventory/shortage management • Medication access/safety • Population health • Outpatient/ambulatory services • Regulatory compliance • Surgical care |
|--|--|

Managed Care/Payer

- | | |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contracting • Formulary management • Insurance/plan management | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Medical writer • Medicaid/Medicare services • Pharmacy benefit manager |
|--|--|

Pharmaceutical Industry

- | | |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Administration/management • Continuing education • Drug information • Health economics and outcomes • Manufacturing/distribution • Marketing/sales • Medical science liaison | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pharmacovigilance • Post-marketing surveillance • Product control quality • Professional relations • Project management • Regulatory affairs/drug policy • Research and development |
|--|---|

Career Options for Pharmacists (continued)

Specialty

- | | |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Administration/management • Clinical* | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clinical patient research • Formulary management |
|--|---|

Other

- | | |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accreditation surveyor • Aerospace/space health • Continuing education provider/reviewer • Cosmeceuticals/cosmetics • Drug information • Forensic pathology • Mail-order service | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Medical writer/editor • Natural supplements/herbal medicines • Poison control • Quality assurance • Travel medicine • Veterinary • Wholesale services |
|--|---|

Other (business and entrepreneurial)

- | | |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Business advisor/investor • Career development coach • Health/life coach • Medication safety management advisor • Patient advocacy board member | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pharmacogenomics advisor • Pharmacy financial consultant • Pharmacy strategy consultant • Regulatory board member • Start-up developer/entrepreneur |
|---|---|

Other (technology)

- | | |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Automation/robotics • Clinical applications/solutions • Clinical data analytics • Clinical software development/integration | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Digital health • Electronic health record design/training • Health/pharmacy informatics • Telehealth services |
|--|--|

*Clinical (consists of a variety of practice settings and disease states)

- | | |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cardiology • Critical Care • Emergency medicine • Home care • Hormone therapy • Immunizations • Infectious disease • Internal medicine • Maternal and women's health • Mental health/substance use disorder | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nuclear • Nutrition support • Oncology • Pain management/palliative care • Pediatric • Psychiatric • Senior care/geriatric • Sexual health • Solid organ transplantation • Toxicology |
|--|--|

[illegible]

Exercise 3: Status of your decision

What steps have you taken toward choosing a career option within the pharmacy profession or in changing your career path? Perhaps you have spent time and effort investigating various kinds of opportunities. Have you worked in a pharmacy or does your family have pharmacists and health care providers that provide you with exposure to their role? Or maybe you have not begun to investigate different options or have only some vague hunches.

Instructions: In the spaces below, answer each of the following questions.

What steps have you taken so far in investigating possible career options?

What pharmacy career options do you think are most likely for you? (Note: You may wish to refer back to the list of options on the **Career Options for Pharmacists** on pages BD-7-9.)

Exercise 4: Decision-making style

A significant aspect of self-knowledge is to recognize that each of us tends to use a particular decision-making style: **analytical (thinker)**, **emotional (feeler)**, or **action oriented (doer)**. It will be helpful for you to become more aware of your own decision-making style and the possible effects of distinctive styles.

Thinkers are primarily analytical. They use an objective approach to decision making and run the risks of ignoring their feelings and over-analyzing an issue rather than acting.

Feelers primarily rely on their emotions in making decisions. They use a more subjective approach to decision making and run the risk of ignoring the importance of rational evidence.

Doers are driven by the need to act. While they are not encumbered with over-analyzing a decision, they may ignore both considered analysis and emotional input in order to act swiftly.

Instructions: Think of an important personal decision you have made (e.g., what pharmacy school to attend, where to live while attending school, your cell phone purchase) and remind yourself of how you reached this decision. Write a brief description of the way you went about making this decision—not its outcome. Decide if thinking, feeling, doing, or a combination guided you in your decision. Which one decision-making style is your predominate style?

You might want to discuss your answer with someone who knows you well. See if they agree with your assessment of yourself as primarily a thinker, feeler, or doer.

Exercise 5: Rating critical factors

The following items describe important aspects of the work of pharmacy professionals. These “critical factors” provide insight into your career decision. Your rating of these critical factors will help you assess your goals, values, strengths, likes, and dislikes.

Instructions: Highlight your rating on the continuum for each critical factor below, and/or go to www.pharmacist.com/career/career-pathways and click on “Online Assessment Tool” to complete this online.

These critical factors have been developed to help you assess your own preferences; however, they do not imply or suggest any judgment about you or your choices. Each pharmacist and student pharmacist are unique. It is quite normal to like certain aspects of a particular pharmacy area, as well as to dislike other aspects. Some statements refer to the degree that you have in a work environment. Consider what you would like to have versus what any current experience.

Critical factors

1. Opportunities for advancement

To what degree do you want a position that allows for advancement?

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Little advancement							Great opportunities for advancement			

2. Leadership development/professional involvement

To what extent do you want a position that allows for the development of leadership skills and professional involvement in the pharmacy profession?

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Little development of leadership skills and professional involvement							Great opportunities for leadership skills/professional involvement			

3. Community impact

To what degree do you want to have ongoing or long-term relationships with patients or clients?

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Little impact							High level of impact			

4. Autonomy

To what extent do you want your work to allow for autonomy in decision making?

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Little/low autonomy High level of autonomy

5. Focus

To what extent do you want your work to allow you to be focused on the future versus a focus only on immediate tasks?

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Immediate tasks only Tasks focused on the future

6. Prestige

To what extent do you want your work to provide professional prestige?

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Provides low prestige Provides high prestige

7. Creating value/positive outcomes

To what extent do you want your work to provide personal fulfillment through the creation of value and positive outcomes?

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Little extent High extent

8. Patient relationships

To what degree do you want your work to have ongoing or long-term relationships with patients?

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
No ongoing/long-term All are long-term relationships

9. Coworker/client relationships

To what degree do you want ongoing or long-term relationships with coworkers or clients?

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
No ongoing/long-term All are long-term relationships

10. Writing/conducting research

How often do you want to engage in writing and/or conducting research?

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
None of my time All of my time

11. Generating new ideas

To what degree do you want your work to involve generating new ideas?

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Little innovative thinking High degree of innovative thinking

12. Supervision/management

To what extent do you want to spend your time organizing, managing, or supervising others and/or business operations?

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
None of my time All of my time

13. Patient interaction

How much time do you want to spend interacting with patients?

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
None of my time All of my time

14. Public interaction

How much time do you want to spend interacting with the public?

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
None of my time All of my time

15. Collaboration

How often do you want to work or collaborate with other health professionals or educate other professionals in your work?

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
None of my time All of my time

16. Family/leisure time

How much free time do you want to have for leisure and family activities?

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
 Little free time Plenty of free time for family and leisure activities

17. Impact on well-being

To what degree do you want to impact the well-being of individuals?

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
 Low degree High degree

18. Problem solving

To what degree do you want to solve problems with tried-and-true alternatives versus untested alternatives in your work?

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
 Tried-and-true Untested alternatives

19. Expertise

How general or specialized is the expertise you require in your work?

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
 Generalized Specialized

20. Repetition

To what degree do you want your work to be composed of activities and tasks that are highly repetitive versus highly variable?

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
 Highly repetitive Highly variable

21. Applying scientific knowledge

How much of your time do you want to spend applying scientific knowledge in your work?

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
 No application High level of application all of the time

22. Applying clinical knowledge

How much of your time do you want to spend applying clinical knowledge in your work?

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
No application High level of application
all of the time

23. Parental leave

To what extent do you want your work setting to offer parental leave opportunities?

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Limited opportunities Unlimited opportunities

24. Compensation

To what degree do you feel compensated for your responsibilities in your work?

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Not well compensated Well compensated

25. Benefit package

How comprehensive should the employee benefit package offered in your work setting?

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Not comprehensive Very comprehensive

Exercise 6: Weighting the critical factors

Review each of the critical factors and ask yourself how important each will be in making your career decision (i.e., how much weight each item will carry). For example, though you may prefer a flexible work schedule, this may carry less weight in your overall decision than your preference for opportunity for advancement.

Instructions:

1. For each critical factor in the following list, assign a priority weighting based **on a scale of 0 to 5 (0 = not at all important; 5 = extremely important)**.
2. When you are finished, highlight five of the critical factors that are most important to you in your career decision.
3. A critical factor that you do not want to have in your role may need to be weighted a five.

Priority Weighting	Critical factors
	Opportunities for advancement
	Leadership development/professional involvement
	Community impact
	Autonomy
	Focus
	Prestige
	Creating value/positive outcomes
	Patient relationships
	Coworker/client relationships
	Writing/conducting research
	Generating new ideas
	Supervision/management
	Patient interaction
	Public interaction
	Collaboration
	Family/leisure time
	Impact on well-being
	Problem solving
	Expertise
	Repetition
	Applying scientific knowledge
	Applying clinical knowledge
	Parental leave
	Compensation
	Benefit package