

ASHP conducted two online surveys in late 2021 to better understand the pharmacy technician shortage in hospitals and health systems and current needs and realities of the pharmacy technician role. One survey was administered to pharmacy executives of multi-hospital/health systems (MHHS) and directors of pharmacy at individual hospital and health-system practice sites (DOP)*. The other survey was administered to pharmacy technicians working in hospitals and health systems, community, home infusion, specialty, and other pharmacy settings.

KEY FINDINGS: PHARMACY ADMINISTRATOR SURVEY

Pharmacy Technician Staffing and Pharmacy Technician Turnover & Vacancy Rates

- The majority of pharmacy administrators reported turnover rates of at least 21-30% in 2021, and nearly 1 in 10 had lost 41% or more of their pharmacy technicians.
- Nearly all health-system pharmacy administrators reported increasing the use of overtime to fill shifts (97%), and nearly 9 out of 10 (89%) reported using pharmacists to fill pharmacy technician shifts or perform technician activities.
- The average vacancy rate for inpatient FTE technician positions is 22.2%. The average vacancy rate for ambulatory FTE technician positions is 20.8%.

Impact of Pharmacy Technician Shortage on Pharmacy Advancements

- Over half (53%) of the respondents reported stalling expansion of new pharmacy services and 48% reported reducing pharmacy services.
- 69% of pharmacy technicians in advanced non-traditional or management roles have been pulled to perform traditional technician responsibilities.
- 41% of pharmacy administrators report outsourcing medication preparation and products as a result of the shortage.
- Respondents report the perception of a severe shortage of pharmacy technicians with sterile compounding experience (84%) and in advanced pharmacy roles (76%), such as tech-check-tech or those in compliance roles.

Pharmacy Technician Responsibilities

- Pharmacy administrators reported a range of functions that hospital and health-system pharmacy technicians perform, including sterile compounding (96%), inventory management (93%), purchasing (84%), non-sterile compounding (84%), hazardous drug handling (82%), controlled substance system management (78%), medication order distribution (60%), supervisory responsibilities (56%), billing and reimbursement (55%), and technician education and training (53%).

Pharmacy Technician Recruitment and Retention Strategies

- Three-quarters (75%) of pharmacy administrators reported they had offered base pay increases in the previous 11 months to attract and retain pharmacy technicians versus 31% before 2021.
- Other financial incentive recruiting strategies in the previous 11 months included offering off-cycle pay raises (64% in 2021 versus 21% before 2021), shift bonuses (62% in 2021 versus 34% before 2021), referral bonus (55% in 2021 versus 21% before 2021), pay incentives based on vacancy rate (53% in 2021 versus 12% before 2021), incentive pay to fill vacant positions on schedule (52% in 2021 versus 10% before 2021), and sign-on bonuses (52% in 2021 versus 12% before 2021).
- Recruiting strategies in the previous 11 months in addition to enhanced job ads and recruitment fairs include recruitment from technician training programs (59% in 2021 versus 54% before 2021), recruitment from other internal health-system departments (57% in 2021 versus 37% before 2021), partnering with external technician training programs to expand a recruitment pool (51% in 2021 versus 48% before 2021), modification of the traditional “technician” job title (43% in 2021 versus 32% before 2021), use of a staffing agency for temporary staff (34% in 2021 versus 18% before 2021) and using a recruitment agency (26% in 2021 versus 12% before 2021).
- Compared to before 2021, more employers are now offering to support professional development as an incentive strategy. This includes offering a career ladder (53% in 2021 versus 48% before 2021), paying for professional benefits such as membership, continuing education, meeting registrations (48% in 2021 versus 39% before 2021), offering modified shift schedules (43% in 2021 versus 31% before 2021), implementing an internal technician training program (38% in 2021 versus 29% before 2021), paying for education expenses for an external, formal technician training program (35% in 2021 versus 17% before 2021), waiving or paying the education expenses for an internal or external formal technician training program (25% in 2021 versus 10% before 2021) and other professional development benefits.

KEY FINDINGS: PHARMACY TECHNICIAN SURVEY

Pharmacy Technician Job Satisfaction

- Pharmacy technicians generally reported strong job satisfaction, with 56% reporting satisfaction.
- Factors contributing to job satisfaction include a desire to help people/patients (30%), contribution to healthcare (19%), salary (19%), and work schedule/flexibility (17%).
- Pharmacy technicians identified supervising pharmacists as important factors towards satisfaction, with 73% of pharmacy technicians indicating this relationship contributes to their job satisfaction.

Pharmacy Technician Motivators

- 54% of pharmacy technicians cite their desire to help patients as the #1 motivation to stay in their jobs.
- Three-quarters (75%) of respondents said higher pay would help retain pharmacy technicians, nearly a third (32%) would like to see employers offer retention bonuses, and 25% desire a career ladder with clear pathways to promotion.
- Pharmacy technicians reported heavy workload and not having enough time (36%), not having enough staff (35%), and compensation/pay (26%) to be top challenges faced in day-to-day job.

Technician Top Reasons for Leaving their Jobs

- Salary was most often cited (42%) as the reason a pharmacy technician might consider leaving their current position.
- Even with that strong job satisfaction, pharmacy technicians are frustrated with heavy workloads, inadequate staffing, and inadequate compensation.

Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Job Decisions

- 52% indicated the COVID-19 pandemic has not influenced the decision to leave or stay in their job.
- 33% indicated that the COVID-19 pandemic has influenced the decision to leave their job.
- 15% indicated the COVID-19 pandemic influenced their decision to stay in their job.

Pharmacy Technician Respondent Profile

- 82% work full time
- 92% are certified pharmacy technicians
- 49% have worked more than 10 years as a pharmacy technician
- 40% have worked three to 10 years in their current position; 39% have been in their position for two years or less
- 39% work in an urban location, and 35% work in a suburban location
- The majority (34%) are between 30-39 years old
- 66% are white, and 86% are female

METHODOLOGY

The MHHS and DOP Administrator survey was sent to 1,952 hospital and health-system pharmacy executives with a response rate of 6.3%. The Pharmacy Technician survey was sent to 74,448 pharmacy technicians from ASHP and the Pharmacy Technician Certification Board (PTCB) databases with a response rate of 7%. Both surveys were focused on helping ASHP understand the current needs and realities of the pharmacy technician role.

*It should be noted that each MHHS respondent accounts for multi-hospitals or health systems, thereby, in the aggregate, they represent many hospitals.