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Pharmacy jobs in Florida projected to grow 23 percent

Tampa Bay Business Journal - by [Margie Manning](#) Senior Staff Writer

Tampa General Hospital has doubled the number of pharmacists on its staff since 2001 and is looking for more. So is the James A. Haley **Veterans Administration Hospital**.

There's a continuing shortage of pharmacists nationwide, and Florida, with its above-average number of senior citizens, ranks among the states most in need of professionals who dispense medications and, increasingly, provide medication management, according to industry groups and academics.

The Florida Agency for Workforce Innovation has projected employment in the field of pharmacy to grow by 23 percent between 2008 and 2016, or 2.92 percent average growth per year, which is much faster than the average for all occupations projected by the agency.

The **U.S. Department of Health and Human Services** estimated in December that there would be a shortfall of 29,000 pharmacists by 2020. By 2030, there's expected to be 38,000 fewer pharmacists than are needed, the department said.

The current economic downturn has slowed hiring somewhat, said Kevin Sneed, clinical director and assistant dean of the division of clinical pharmacy at **USF Health**. Additionally, shortages of pharmacists are more regional than they have been in the past with more job openings in rural areas than the Tampa-St. Petersburg metro area, said Gary Levin, dean of the **School of Pharmacy at Lake Erie College of Osteopathic Medicine** in Bradenton.

But as the population ages and the first wave of baby boomers turns 65 in 2010, there will be "tremendous opportunity" for pharmacists, said Sneed, who has a major role in developing the four-year doctor of pharmacy, or PharmD, program that **University of South Florida** expects to begin in 2011.

People under 65 annually consume 10.1 prescriptions on average, while those 65 and over consume 23.5 prescriptions on average, according to an assessment of pharmacist work force needs prepared for USF Health.

70 career paths

The demand for pharmacists is closely tied to the number of retail prescriptions, which grow in volume each year, the USF analysis said.

But dispensing medicine in a retail store is only one of about 70 career paths within pharmacy, said Levin.

Pharmacists can help manage medication therapy for patients with chronic illnesses and those enrolled in the **Medicare** prescription drug program. Some give immunizations. Many work in nursing homes because every long-term care facility in Florida is required to employ a consulting pharmacist, Sneed said.

Others work at hospitals, such as the Haley VA facility, which Sneed said has gone from a staff of 50 six years ago to 90 currently.

There were about 35 pharmacists on staff at Tampa General in 2001 when Earnest Alexander was hired. Now, there are about 70 to 75 pharmacists on staff, said Alexander, manager of clinical pharmacy services. They not only dispense medications but also are charged with making sure it's the right medication given the patient's condition, history and ability to tolerate the drug.

The hospital's transplant center and its intensive care and burn units require pharmacists with specialized knowledge, as do its 11 disease-specific accreditations and certifications, Alexander said.

Pharmacists also work at pharmacy benefit managers, companies that process pharmacy claims and operate mail-order pharmacies through which they ship prescriptions to patients. **WellDyneRx Inc.**, a national PBM that recently opened a facility in Lakeland, currently employs three pharmacists, but as it ramps up operations, it could have as many as 100 pharmacists over the next few years, said Damien Lamendola, president and CEO.

Another employment model is **Walgreen Co.** (NYSE: WAG), which has large numbers of pharmacists working out of a central distribution center where they fill prescriptions that are shipped to retail stores for pickup by customers. The program was rolled out in nearly 400 Florida stores last year and early this year and is expected to be in place in every Walgreens in Florida by year's end.

It was developed as a way to deal with a shortage of pharmacists and also to allow pharmacists in the stores to become more patient-oriented, Levin said.

Six-figure positions



Depending on the position, pharmacy generally is a six-figure job, Sneed said. Pharmacists right out of school start at about \$100,000 at Tampa General, Alexander said. Signing bonuses sometimes are offered for positions in which the pharmacist works overnight or has a particular specialty. A signing bonus is more likely to fill a position in a rural area, not in the Tampa metro area, Levin said.

The demand for pharmacists in Florida is strong enough that neither Sneed nor Levin expects the planned USF pharmacy program to impact enrollment at the five existing programs in the state, including at LECOM.

“University of Florida had over 2,000 applications for 300 spots in 2007, and we’ve seen similar numbers and ratios in other schools,” Sneed said. “We don’t see ourselves as competing. We see ourselves as offering more.”

Pharmacist coaches

The cost of caring for a patient with diabetes fell by \$1,079 a year when a pharmacist “coach” worked with the patient, according to a study sponsored by the American Pharmacists Association Foundation. The “Diabetes Ten City Challenge,” which covered the Tampa Bay area and nine other communities, found that pharmacists and employers working together to help people manage their diabetes also led to improved clinical outcomes. Although the study showed positive results, many pharmacies could not offer the same level of coaching services right now, said William Ellis, CEO of the Foundation and study co-author. He said the following should happen:

- Pharmacies need to redesign space to create private consultation rooms.
- Electronic health information systems are needed for better data exchange.
- Employers need to view pharmacy coaching services as a long-term savings and not solely as an expense.
- Payors have to change the way they reimburse pharmacists to include payment for coaching services.

— Margie Manning

mmmanning@bizjournals.com | 813.342.2473

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