

## Washington's Health Workforce Sentinel Network *Findings Brief: Pharmacies*

Community/retail and hospital pharmacies provided information about their workforce needs to the Washington State Health Workforce Sentinel Network in April/May 2021. This Findings Brief provides response themes as well as examples of specific comments. Complete responses from pharmacies may be viewed at [www.wa.sentinelnetwork.org/findings/](http://www.wa.sentinelnetwork.org/findings/).

Themes from pharmacies' responses to pandemic-related questions are highlighted below. More pandemic-related findings are at [www.wa.sentinelnetwork.org/findings/covid-19/](http://www.wa.sentinelnetwork.org/findings/covid-19/).

### Effects of the COVID-19 pandemic reported by Pharmacies: Themes and examples

#### **In the past 6 months, have there been overall staffing changes at your facility due to the COVID-19 pandemic?**

**THEMES:** Pharmacies report difficulty in increasing staffing levels to respond to vaccine demand.

- *Extremely short staffed due to refusal of administrators to fill existing vacancies in order to save the hospital money.*
- *Every retail pharmacy is understaffed. I'm concerned about patient safety, as well as my staff's well-being.*
- *No [staffing changes]. Once the vaccine was released, despite significantly increased demand, the organization will not provide for increased staff at our location.*

#### **In the past 6 months, what about the staffing arrangements at your facility made it easier to respond to the pandemic? What made it harder?**

- *It is significantly harder to respond to the pandemic because the traditional pharmacy responsibilities of our staff have not changed but we are now expected to provide vaccines with no extra help in addition to our regular responsibilities.*
- *No additional staff added, increased workload made it harder. Especially increased call volume due to pandemic-related items: Covid testing and vaccination scheduling.*
- *Harder due to slowness of board of pharmacy to approve licenses after submission.*

#### **Describe the workforce impact, if any, of the use of telehealth at your facility over the past 6 months.**

**THEMES:** Pharmacies report very limited use of telehealth.

- *We have not utilized telehealth.*
- *Not much impact, though consultations are more commonly done over the phone now. This makes it easier to complete tasks.*
- *No use of Telehealth, regretfully. It is an untapped technology which could positively improve care for rural residents.*

#### **Did your organization do anything to encourage your staff to receive the COVID-19 vaccine? If so, what strategies were or were not successful?**

- *Education and monetary incentives.*
- *Discussed risk/benefit and side effect profile. Everyone in the pharmacy has been vaccinated.*
- *Absolutely, but given the inability to make getting a vaccine mandatory (the same has been the issue with the FLU vaccine over the years) the anti-vaccine staff have not taken the vaccine.*
- *Continued conversation and support to address any concerns or questions.*

#### **What are your top workforce needs that could be alleviated by policy, regulatory, and/or payment changes?**

- *Make the licensing process easier and much faster. It has taken months in some cases for them to get licensed.*
- *Change in Federal designation for payment algorithms designating Pharmacists as providers.*
- *Permanent ruling allowing trained Pharmacy Technicians to administer vaccines post-pandemic.*
- *Remove the requirement of pharmacy technicians needing a college degree. Not required in most states.*
- *Max amount of scripts a pharmacist can check, minimum amount of support staff required, breaks and lunches being mandatory for pharmacists.*
- *Require that controls, MTMs, and immunizations count as more than one script when calculating ANC hours/number scripts.*
- *Establish legitimacy of telehealth for pharmacy.*

## Pharmacies (Spring 2021)

Pharmacies and other health care facilities in Washington provided key, on-the-ground information to the Washington State Health Workforce Sentinel Network. Below are highlights of recent findings. More pharmacy findings, along with those from other health care facilities, are at [wa.sentinelnetwork.org](http://wa.sentinelnetwork.org).

### Pharmacies - Occupations with exceptionally long vacancies

Top occupations cited as having exceptionally long vacancies by date of reporting		
Fall 2020	Spring 2021	Rank
Pharmacy technician	Pharmacy technician	1
Registered nurse	Pharmacist	2
n/a	Pharmacy aide	3
	Registered nurse	4

↑ Most cited

\*Pharmacies were first included as a Sentinel Network facility type option in Spring 2020. Fall 2020 was the first time that pharmacies participated as Sentinels. The number of responses to this question in Spring 2021 was much higher than the prior data collection opportunity, likely reflecting pharmacies' rapid growth in demand for staff to deliver vaccines and other pandemic-related services.

#### Demand for healthcare workforce reported by Pharmacies

**THEME: Demand was largely influenced by pandemic-related workplace stress.**

- Covid has affected Retail Pharmacy immensely. By providing a high amount vaccines while already short handed, increases stress on the job and burn-out. Volume of prescriptions filled have also increased.
- [Pharmacist, pharmacy technician] Vaccine administration and preparation demand has greatly increased. This increase in demand is in addition to traditional pharmacy duties, which is still same. There have been no increases in staffing to account for this increase in demand.
- [Pharmacist] multiple resignations.

#### Reasons for vacancies reported by Pharmacies

- [Pharmacy technician, pharmacy aide] Many are getting paid more in unemployment than we can offer and thus they are unwilling to work for us. Taking too long for applications to get approved at through Washington Board of Health, they are timing out if the hiring process.
- Washington requires pharmacy technicians to have a college degree. Most other states consider the national PCTB test a standard which qualifies a technician. Pharmacy Technician College is expensive and unnecessary.
- [Pharmacy technician] Board of pharmacy not getting their licenses approved fast enough, salary is too low compared to other positions, high stress of job.

#### New roles for existing employees and new occupations hired by Pharmacies

- [Pharmacy technician] Helps give vaccines now.
- [Pharmacist] The staff pharmacist has increased responsibilities of managing product.
- [Pharmacy technician] Pharmacy tech role seem to have shifted to focus solely on vaccines, script count had to wait.

## Pharmacies (Spring 2021)

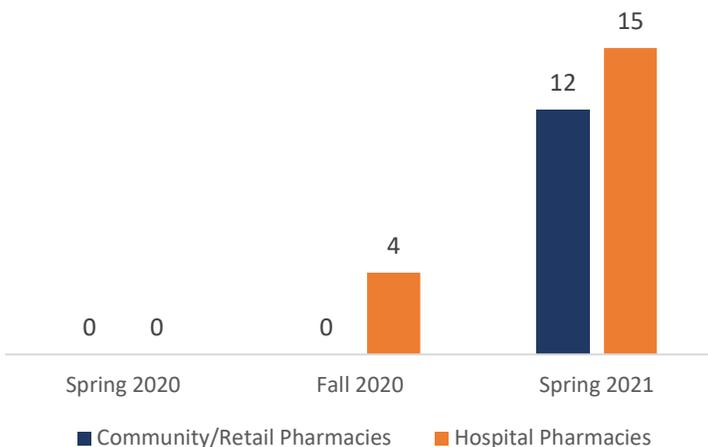
### Reasons for worker retention/turnover problems reported by Pharmacies

- [Pharmacist] Increased stress of Covid has caused staff turnover.
- [Pharmacy technician, pharmacy aide] Risk averse to patient contact.
- [Pharmacy technician, pharmacy aide] Worker burnout.
- [Pharmacist] Area too rural.

### Changes in Pharmacies' priorities regarding orientation/onboarding for new employees and training for existing/incumbent workers

- Due to vaccination efforts, additional training requirements for handling workflow and documentation.
- COVID safety.
- Training to give vaccines by implementing more CE'S.
- Started using a recruiter to because so many people just applying places to continue to get their unemployment and had no interest in interviewing.
- COVID billing.

**Number of Sentinel Network Responses from Pharmacies in WA by Data Collection Date\***



\*Pharmacies were first included as a Sentinel Network facility type option in Spring 2020. The federal program authorizing pharmacies to administer COVID vaccines began on Feb. 11, 2021. All Washington residents age 16 and up became eligible for the COVID-19 vaccine on April 15, 2021.

**Number of Community/Retail & Hospital Pharmacy Responses by Accountable Community of Health (Spring 2021)**



### About the Washington Health Workforce Sentinel Network

The Sentinel Network links the healthcare sector with policymakers, workforce planners and educators to identify and respond to changing demand for healthcare workers, with a focus on identifying newly emerging skills and roles required by employers. The Sentinel Network is an initiative of Washington's Health Workforce Council, conducted collaboratively by Washington's Workforce Board and the University of Washington's Center for Health Workforce Studies. Funding to initiate the Sentinel Network came from the Healthier Washington initiative, with ongoing support from Governor Inslee's office and the Washington State Legislature.

#### **Why become a Sentinel? As a Sentinel, you can:**

- Communicate your workforce needs and ensure that the state is prepared to respond to the transforming healthcare environment.
- Have access to current and actionable information about emerging healthcare workforce needs.
- Compare your organization's experience and emerging workforce demand trends with similar employer groups.

To view an interactive summary of findings and to provide information from your organization: [www.wa.sentinelnetwork.org](http://www.wa.sentinelnetwork.org).

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