An overview of the main findings from the 2008 pharmacy workforce census

Findings from the 2008 pharmacy workforce census provide information on the socio-demographic profile and employment patterns of pharmacists registered with the Royal Pharmaceutical Society. In this article, Elizabeth Seston and Karen Hassell, from the Centre for Pharmacy Workforce Studies at the University of Manchester, give a brief overview of the main findings.

All pharmacists on the Register of Pharmacists (formerly the Register of Pharmaceutical Chemists) in August 2008 who had a registered address in Great Britain were included in the census. From this, a sample of 43,845 pharmacists, 30,517 usable responses were received giving an overall response rate of 69.6 per cent. Male pharmacists and those under the age of 39 were slightly under-represented among respondents to the 2008 census, so some response bias is possible in the findings. Differences in response rates were noted for England, Scotland and Wales — 68.9 per cent, 72.4 per cent and 74.7 per cent, respectively.

The census

The full workforce census report for 2008 is available to download from the Royal Pharmaceutical Society’s website (see Panel below). The following analysis is based on data from all respondents to the census.

Age and gender

Fifty-nine per cent of respondents were female and most (65.5 per cent) were aged under 50 years. The mean age of census respondents was 44 years, with male respondents on average older than female respondents (49 years and 41 years, respectively).

Employment situation

In 2008, 82.8 per cent of respondents were actively employed in pharmacy. This means there was a slight decrease in the proportion of pharmacists not actively employed in pharmacy (17.2 per cent) since the last census in 2005 (18.8 per cent of respondents).

The mean age of pharmacists who were currently actively employed within pharmacy was 42 years, compared with 58 years for pharmacists not in active employment and 47 years for pharmacists working entirely outside pharmacy.

Economic inactivity and intention to return to practice

As in 2005, most (60.3 per cent) of those not actively employed were pharmacists who were on maternity leave or looking after family who had risen from 17.4 per cent in 2005 to 22.2 per cent in 2008. Two-thirds (65.5 per cent) of those who were economically inactive in 2008 (excluding pharmacists over state pension age) were intending to return to practice.

Employment status

Respondents who were actively employed in pharmacy were asked to report whether they were employed or self-employed. Almost two-thirds (65.2 per cent) of respondents reported that they were employed. More than a quarter (27.4 per cent) of actively employed pharmacists were self-employed and 7.4 per cent of pharmacists were both employees and self-employed.

Sector of practice

Respondents were given the opportunity to record up to four jobs, and the hours worked in each one. Community pharmacy was still the largest sector of practice with 71.0 per cent of those actively employed working in this sector. Hospital pharmacy accounted for 21.4 per cent of all actively employed pharmacists.

The same trend was noted when the unit of analysis was jobs rather than people, with community jobs accounting for 44.4 per cent of all posts. Community pharmacy locum posts accounted for the largest proportion of all posts (23.1 per cent).

Number of jobs held

Of those respondents who were actively employed in pharmacy, 16.7 per cent had more than one job. This varies by sector, with 71.1 per cent of those in academia and 50.7 per cent of those in primary care having more than one job, compared with 19.9 per cent, 21.4 per cent and 19.3 per cent, respectively, for the community, hospital and industry sectors.

Patterns of work

Since pharmacists may hold more than one job, the hours worked in each of the jobs were summed to give the total number of hours worked by each individual. For economically active pharmacists in 2008, the average number of hours worked was 33.5 hours. This is the same as the previous census.

The total number of hours worked was also broken down into two categories to illustrate the division between full-time and part-time employment (defined here as 33 hours and above, and 32 hours and below, respectively). In 2008, 32.3 per cent of respondents were working part-time, with part-time working more common among women than men (41.3 per cent vs 18.6 per cent). The proportion of pharmacists working more than 48 hours per week has risen by 1.0 per cent since 2005. Men were almost five times more likely than women to work over 48 hours (19.6 per cent vs 4.0 per cent) and long working hours were most common in the academic, industrial and community sectors.

Multi-sector working

More than one in 10 actively employed pharmacists (11.4 per cent) worked in more than one sector. Most multi-sector workers (90.4 per cent) reported working within two sectors and female pharmacists were more likely than men to work in two or more sectors (11.9 per cent vs 10.7 per cent).

Mobility across sectors

Having data over several years allows some exploration of mobility across the main employment sectors in pharmacy. Pharmacists who responded to both the 2005 and 2008 surveys and reported working in one job only at the time of both surveys were included in this analysis. Most pharmacists working in a sector in 2005 were still working in the same sector three years later in 2008. The greatest mobility was in the “other” sector, with almost a quarter of pharmacists (23.7 per cent) working in this sector having moved elsewhere.

Workforce census 2008

The full 2008 census report — “Pharmacy workforce census 2008: main findings” — is available to download from the Royal Pharmaceutical Society’s website (www.rpsgb.org.uk/pdfs/census08.pdf).

Work-life balance and plans to change work-life balance

The measure used to assess work-life balance was derived from a study of work-life balance that had previously been conducted in eight different occupational groups, including some healthcare sectors, but not pharmacy. The measure consists of 10 statements about work-life bal-
Work-life balance measure

Comparing the proportion of pharmacists who agreed with the statements about work-life balance, men were significantly more likely than women to agree with all 10 statements, thus suggesting that men experience more problems with work-life balance.

More than half of all actively employed males (52.2 per cent) who answered the question reported that they work long hours because their post demands it, compared with just over a third (34.8 per cent) of women.

When responses to the work-life balance scores were summed to give an overall score, the mean score was 12.9, with male pharmacists scoring more highly than females. A high score indicates greater problems with work-life balance. The highest scores for work-life balance were recorded by pharmacists working in academia and community pharmacy, with primary care pharmacists recording the lowest.

Intentions to change work-life balance

Thirteen per cent of actively employed pharmacists thought it highly likely that within the next two years they would quit the sector in which they currently work; one in 10 pharmacists (10.9 per cent) thought it highly likely they would quit the profession within two years. Male pharmacists were more likely than female pharmacists to report a high likelihood of leaving the sector and of leaving the profession within the next two years. Evidence from the 2005 census indicates that of those pharmacists under state pension age who had expressed a “considerable” or “high” likelihood of leaving the profession within two years in 2005, 92.9 per cent were still on the Register in 2007, suggesting a weak relationship between intentions to quit and actual quitting. Pharmacists with above average work-life balance scores (and hence greater problems with work-life balance) were more likely to be considering quitting both sector and profession.

Conclusion

The findings from the 2008 pharmacy workforce census indicate that most respondents were in active employment in pharmacy and, as in the 2005 census, most were employed in the community pharmacy sector. Locum working remained popular, with locum posts accounting for almost one in four pharmacy posts. Average working hours remained unchanged, although the proportion of pharmacists working more than 48 hours per week has risen slightly.

For the first time, pharmacists were questioned about their work-life balance. The responses to the work-life balance scale indicate higher work-life balance scores (and therefore greater problems with work-life balance) for male pharmacists and those working in community pharmacy and academia.

As in 2005, approximately one in 10 pharmacists is considering quitting the profession within two years, although the relationship between intentions and actual quitting remains unclear. There also appeared to be some relationship between problems with work-life balance and intentions to quit.

References