

# ASHP Guidelines on the Recruitment, Selection, and Retention of Pharmacy Personnel

## Purpose

These guidelines are intended to assist pharmacy managers in the recruitment, selection, and retention of qualified employees. The pharmacy manager working in an organized health care system will usually have to work with the system's human resources department and within the framework of the specific recruitment, selection, and hiring policies of the organization.

## Recruitment

**Position Descriptions.** Well-developed job descriptions are extremely important in addressing many personnel issues. They are often used to establish salary ranges, define performance expectations, and write performance evaluations, but they can also be crucial tools in a successful recruitment effort.<sup>1</sup> The position description should contain detailed information on the knowledge, skills, experience, and abilities that an acceptable candidate should possess. The following information may be included in a position description:

- Position title and position control number (if applicable),
- Duties, essential job functions, and responsibilities of the position,
- Education, training, experience, and licensure required,
- Knowledge, skills, and abilities required to perform assigned duties,
- Reporting relationships,
- Pay grade and salary range (optional),
- Education and training required to maintain competence, and
- Other specifications of the position that may be required to meet legal requirements (e.g., the Americans with Disabilities Act) or the objectives of the organization (e.g., residency or certification requirements).

[Note: A variety of sample job descriptions can be found in Section 7.3 of the *Pharmacy Management Toolkit: Tools of the Trade for Pharmacy Managers and Directors* (CD-ROM) and in module 1 of *Competence Assessment Tools for Health-System Pharmacies* (online and print versions), both available from ASHP.]

A revised position description should be reviewed with staff members currently in that position and with the supervisor of that position. In many workplaces, human resources departments maintain a file of position descriptions and may require approval of all position descriptions in the organization. Procedures specific to the workplace should be followed. Staff with legal expertise should review revised position descriptions to determine compliance with organizational and legal requirements.

**Recruitment Sources.** Recruitment processes will depend on the type of position being filled. Strategies for filling a support staff position may not be appropriate when searching for a management candidate and vice versa. A recruitment plan

should be developed for each position being filled. This plan should incorporate strategies that have worked in the past while allowing for innovative ideas. Organizations that recruit frequently or have very limited candidate pools should consider a continuous recruitment plan so that a list of prospective candidates is available even before an opening occurs.

Recruitment of individuals from within the department or the organization (e.g., from another department) creates internal growth opportunities and may result in greater employee retention and staff loyalty. Internal recruitment may also be less disruptive and expensive. To facilitate internal recruitment, notice of a vacant position can be posted within the organization before the information is made available to outsiders. Posting can be accomplished by various means, including memoranda, e-mail, voice mail, newsletters, announcements at staff meetings, and bulletin boards.

Recruitment of outside candidates expands the number of potential candidates and the experience available to the organization. It brings in new talent and discourages a reliance on seniority as the primary basis for promotion. Budgetary constraints and the urgency to fill a position may affect the recruitment method selected for external candidates. When recruitment of individuals outside the organization becomes necessary, the following methods should be considered:

- Advertisements in professional journals, newspapers, state professional society newsletters, and electronic bulletin boards,
- Personnel placement services provided by national or state professional societies,
- Oral and written recommendations from colleagues. Some organizations offer a “finder’s fee” for hires that result from an employee referral,
- Personal discussion or correspondence with potential candidates,
- Recruitment visits to colleges of pharmacy or to facilities that conduct technician-training programs,
- Professional recruiting firms, which typically charge the organization a percentage of the position’s annual salary. In addition, recruitment advertising companies offer access to a list of job seekers for a fee,
- Familiarizing students with the organization by offering summer jobs or participating in college of pharmacy experiential rotations,
- Tuition assistance programs for students in exchange for future work commitments,
- A “prospect list” of individuals applying for previous job openings, which can often be supplied by the human resources department,
- Internet-job-site postings,
- Community job fairs and local or state welfare-to-work programs, and
- Organization-sponsored events such as continuing-education sessions, award presentations, or community outreach programs.

The ability to recruit qualified candidates will depend on a multitude of factors, including the financial stability and

location of the organization, the area's cost of living, the organization's compensation program (including salary, fringe benefits, and raise structure), the position's schedule and reporting structure, opportunities for professional growth and advancement, and the reputation and scope of pharmaceutical services offered. Only some of these factors are within the pharmacy manager's control.

**Preinterview Information.** The applicant's correspondence, resumé or curriculum vitae, letters of recommendation, academic records, and completed application form (if any) should be carefully evaluated on the basis of the position description to determine the suitability of the candidate for an interview.

There are certain legal restrictions on the type of information that may be requested from candidates on an application form. In general, an application form may request only information that relates directly to the evaluation of the applicant's ability to perform the job for which he or she is applying. If an application form different from that of the organization is used, it is advisable to have the human resources and legal departments review it before distribution to potential candidates.

## Selection

**Initial Screening Interview.** An initial screening interview may be necessary if several qualified candidates have been identified. The screening interview is generally a brief interview conducted by the human resources department or the direct supervisor for the position; it offers a quick assessment of the suitability of the candidate for the position. This interview is often conducted by telephone, especially if the candidate lives far away. The screening interview should be documented and included in the applicant's file.

**The Interview Process.** A successful interview process is one that matches the best available candidate with a specific position. The process should allow the interviewers to predict the future performance of candidates as accurately as possible. One style of interview is the individual interview—one interviewer and one interviewee. Individual interviews offer the advantages of simplicity, ease of scheduling, and consistency of perspective. Because they are less intimidating to the candidate than group interviews, individual interviews may allow the interviewer to more accurately evaluate the applicant and provide the applicant with more opportunities to ask questions. The disadvantage of an individual interview is that it does not allow for multiple viewpoints and therefore increases the chance that something will be overlooked.

Another style, team interviewing, involves a group of interviewers. Members of the team may interview the candidate individually and then pool their results or they may interview the candidate as a group. The well-prepared team approach offers multiple perspectives within a standardized evaluation scheme. Its disadvantages are extra time consumed to train the team and conduct interviews and the intimidating effect it may have on candidates. Its advantage is that it incorporates more individuals into the process of analyzing a candidate's qualifications.<sup>2</sup> Team interviews foster the ideal of teamwork, and the involved employees share responsibility for the success or failure of the person hired. They also provide an opportunity to observe the candidate's ability to interact with groups, which may be important if the position will require that type of activity.

The composition of the interview team will depend on the position being filled. The team should include people with a common interest in the outcome of the selection process and people who have been in the organization long enough to share with the applicant some history of the organization and the department.<sup>2</sup>

Characteristics of an effective interview process include the following:

- Prior to the interview, the manager should provide the following to the candidate: information about the health-system institution, department, city, and state (if the applicant is not from the area); an agenda for the interview; the position description; travel directions to the facility; and clarification of expenses that will be incurred or reimbursed.
- The interview should be carefully planned. Consider the availability of those who need to participate in the process and allow adequate time for each event, including a tour of the facility (if needed).
- Interviewers should be well prepared. Preinterview information submitted by the candidate should be distributed to and reviewed by participants in advance of an interview.
- Carefully planned, open-ended questions should be developed in advance. Literature can be consulted to obtain sample questions and questions that are inadvisable or prohibited by law.<sup>2-5</sup> Human resources departments can usually assist in developing questions. (Refer to the appendix for sample questions.)
- To the extent possible, a core group of questions should be asked of all candidates as a means of comparing them. This does not negate the need to investigate different areas for each candidate or to pursue specific questions that surface during the interview.
- Questions should focus on predetermined criteria for the position and the qualifications of the candidates. The goal is to match the best candidate with the vacant position. Questions should focus on past performance, which is often a good indicator of future performance. In addition to questions regarding professional competency, the interview should contain questions that will help determine whether the applicant's attitudes and behaviors will be suitable for the job. Behavior-based selection criteria should be used when possible.
- The interviewer should give the candidate a realistic view of the position, including both favorable and unfavorable information. If the candidate is "oversold" on the position, dissatisfaction may set in when the truth becomes apparent.
- Performance standards and methods used for evaluation should be fully explained, and opportunities for professional growth should be presented.
- A description of employee benefits (e.g., medical insurance, vacation, sick leave, retirement benefits, and holidays) should be provided, either by the manager or by the human resources department.
- The initial salary and salary range for the position should be discussed with the candidate.
- The employee work schedule should be reviewed with the candidate.
- Any additional services or covered expenses the department offers should be outlined. Examples of these services of covered expenses include serving as a

provider of continuing-education programs, travel expenses and time off for continuing-education programs, payment of professional membership fees, and any other benefits that would attract the candidate to the position.

- A tour of the department should be provided.
- If the candidate is not from the area, a tour of the region should be given. Employees of the department or a real estate agency may show a candidate the area and describe the housing market and local schools.
- A follow-up letter is sent to the candidate after the interview to express thanks for interest in the position and the organization and to advise the candidate of the next steps. Timely and well-organized communication between recruiters and candidates is essential to a successful recruitment effort.

Each interview should be documented to keep track of each candidate's responses and to avoid confusion later. Documentation could include interview questions and the candidate's responses or simply a rating of the candidate's responses to specific questions. One person may be designated to collect and collate comments from a group interview. Documentation should occur immediately after the interview.<sup>2</sup> When considering a potential employee, the interviewer should examine punctuality, completeness and accuracy of the resumé or curriculum vitae, communication skills, compensation expectations, skills and knowledge pertinent to the position, and optimal fit with co-workers. The recruitment team should agree in advance on a systematic method for selecting the successful candidate.

**Background Verification.** The accuracy of information provided by the candidate should be verified by the human resources department. Information may be obtained from the following sources:

- Personal reference letters provided by the applicant,
- Letters of reference provided by previous employers or preceptors (with the applicant's permission),
- State board of pharmacy records,
- Academic records, and
- Legal background searches (when permitted by law and/or by the applicant).

**Job Offer.** The job offer should be made as quickly as possible after the interview process is completed. Offers should be made to candidates with enthusiasm and should include a deadline for response. Information about candidate selection should be kept confidential until the offer has been accepted. The organization may have specific policies and procedures regarding job offers.<sup>2</sup>

The salary offered to a candidate will usually be competitive with salaries for similar jobs in other organizations in the same market and compatible with the organization's existing salary structure. The market may vary, depending on the position. For example, the market for a pharmacy technician may be local, whereas the market for a pharmacist or pharmacy manager may be regional or national. To preserve equity within the organization, the salary offered to a candidate generally should be consistent with salaries of staff currently in that position. When exceptions are considered, it may become necessary to reassess the compensation of existing staff.

In addition to salary, other commitments made to a candidate should be expressed in writing as part of the formal job offer. These may include the following:

- Date on which employment will begin,
- Supervisor's name and position,
- Position description,
- Performance standards and evaluation system,
- Next performance review date,
- Next compensation increase date,
- Expected work schedule and whether it is subject to change depending on future needs of the department,
- Employee benefits (e.g., insurance, vacation, tuition assistance, sick leave, holidays, and retirement and pension benefits),
- Miscellaneous commitments (e.g., employment bonus, relocation expenses, licensure reimbursement, payment for professional association memberships, and payment for attendance at professional education programs), and
- Potential drug screening (as applicable and in keeping with the law) or employee physical examination and the dates of these activities.

## Retention

Staff turnover is costly. The time required to recruit and train new employees has been shown to cause a temporary loss of productivity in the workplace.<sup>6</sup> Staff turnover also has a negative impact on staff morale, which may further reduce productivity and increase turnover. Because individuals have varied needs and wants that may change over time, there is no consistent formula for managers to apply to ensure employee retention.<sup>7-9</sup> Each organization's experience will depend on such factors as the age of employees, the employees' stages in life and career, the organizational structure, the work environment, and the work itself.

Retention may compete with recruitment. For example, creating staff positions with exclusively morning shifts may help retention but hurt recruitment, because fewer candidates are interested in evening shifts. When competing issues arise, pharmacy managers must balance them with the short- and long-term departmental goals and the current demand for employment.

Each organization should identify and assess retention factors by examining the unique aspects of the respective department and organization. For example, a committee broadly representing the organization could be established to determine major retention factors. On the basis of this assessment, a retention plan should be developed. The plan should be reviewed periodically as the needs of employees change; employee surveys may help determine these. The following factors may be considered in analyzing staff retention:

- **Training period.** The department should devote sufficient time and attention to training. Prepare for the new employee's first day by providing him or her with key material in advance and by developing an organized training schedule. Introduce the new employee to key people on the first day and have everyone in the department introduce themselves during the orientation period. Communicate with the new employee regularly during the training period and throughout the first three months.<sup>10</sup> Sufficient training time ensures that the new employee is comfortable in the new work environment and decreases the likelihood that he or she will become frustrated in the new position. Some organizations have developed a structured mentoring program in which a new employee is paired with a senior employee during the training period.

- *Intent to stay.* In several studies, this factor was the best predictor of staff retention.<sup>11</sup> Employees can simply be asked whether they intend to stay. Replies will reflect employee perceptions and should be considered in light of behavior (i.e., the actual turnover rate). Replies also may be influenced by the employees' fear of reprisal.
- *Job satisfaction.* Job satisfaction is a measure of the degree to which individuals like their jobs, their work environment, and relationships with their coworkers. Job satisfaction is important to retention, although the relationship may be direct or indirect. Employees can be asked how satisfied they are with their jobs; there are many survey instruments to assist pharmacy managers and directors in performing this task.<sup>12</sup> Job dissatisfaction does not necessarily lead to staff turnover if other factors are more important to the individual.<sup>13,14</sup>
- *Pay and benefits.* These refer to the remuneration for work performed and the organization's overall benefit plan. Pay may be hourly (a wage) or salaried and may include overtime premiums or bonuses and incentive plans. A benefit plan may include life, medical, dental, disability, and liability insurance; tuition payments; retirement packages; paid organizational membership dues; sick leave; paid vacation; child care; and prescription benefits. The value of specific benefits to an employee will likely change over time. Many organizations offer a benefits plan that gives the employee the option of choosing benefits individually suited to stages in his or her life and career.
- *Performance management.* Performance appraisal is a periodic assessment of an employee's performance throughout the year. Performance appraisal is only one step in a performance management process that includes appraisal, ongoing feedback, goal setting, and development. This process is important to the success of the manager, the employee, and the organization. The goal of performance management is to share information that will help the employee grow, both personally and professionally, and improve the organization. Periodic discussions with the employee are necessary to provide and receive feedback and to avoid surprises at the time of the scheduled performance appraisal.<sup>15</sup> Direct observation and evaluation by supervisors and coworkers can contribute to a meaningful appraisal.
- *Recognition and awards.* Employees often feel that recognition is lacking in the workplace.<sup>7-10</sup> New supervisors or managers should receive training in employee recognition, which includes both formal and informal feedback mechanisms, from structured employee of the month (or year) programs to a simple thank-you given in private or at a department meeting. Managers should identify how employees want to be recognized, through employee surveys or informal discussions.<sup>10</sup> Methods of employee recognition include
  - Thank-you notes,
  - Commendations,
  - Acknowledgment at department meetings,
  - Organization-wide events during National Pharmacy Week,
  - Employee of the month, quarter, or year,
  - Support for attendance at a professional meeting, and
  - Small awards such as movie tickets or gift certificates for coffee.<sup>16</sup>
- *Promotion opportunities.* These may be in the form of formal promotions, career advancement programs, training opportunities, or special project or committee appointments. Flat organizational structures provide fewer formal opportunities for staff promotion. Employees who have made personal investments in the organization—through expanded responsibilities associated with promotion—may have stronger feelings of loyalty that translate into increased retention. Succession planning is a key organizational strategy that ensures the availability of future leaders.
- *Job design.* This refers to the general tasks that an employee performs—the content of the work. Job design includes autonomy, the complexity of tasks, and the support and tools provided to the employee. Studies have found that job content is more highly correlated with retention as the level of an employee's education increases.<sup>11</sup> Motivational theories suggest that the job itself can motivate intrinsically and that success in the job can lead to increased employee satisfaction.
- *Peer relations.* This refers to working relationships with peers, nurses, physicians, and technical support staff. Peer relations are often rated highly as a reason for staying with an organization. It is difficult to predict during the interview process how a candidate's peer relations will develop, but past behaviors and discussion of hypothetical scenarios can provide some insight.
- *Kinship responsibilities.* This refers to family considerations, such as child care needs, spouse-employment transfers, and care for elderly relatives. Child and elder care needs are important for working parents. These considerations are also difficult to screen for during the interview process, and they will change over time. Legal restrictions prevent recruiters from asking some questions; the organization's human resources department should be able to offer advice on this issue.
- *Opportunity.* This refers to other options in the job market. Obviously, tight job markets (a relative lack of alternative positions) increase retention, whereas open job markets (those with many other open positions) may increase turnover. Managers should always be attentive to retaining good employees, but in open job markets they need to be especially attentive.
- *Staff-development opportunities.* This refers to job training, educational opportunities, and tuition reimbursement or other educational and personal growth opportunities for staff. Training and educational opportunities can affect recognition and awards, promotion opportunities, job design, and peer relations, so they can have a big impact on employee retention.
- *Management style.* This refers to the organizational structure and prevalent management style in the organization (e.g., on the spectrum from autocratic to participatory). The accessibility of management staff may be a factor as well as the extent to which staff input is encouraged. Each employee will prefer a particular management style; no one style will work equally well for all employees. Managers must be sensitive to the management styles that are effective for their staff.
- *Employee coaching.* This refers to the manager's mentorship role. Managers should provide feedback to employees regarding performance, teach specific job-related skills, hold formal and informal career discussions with employees, help employees achieve greater

self-awareness, advise employees on how best to prepare for career options, and assist employees in preparing a yearly career-development plan.<sup>10</sup> In addition, it is important that managers recognize and acknowledge the employee's contributions to the health system.

- **Management survey.** This refers to the organization's commitment to identifying opportunities for improving management. Such opportunities can be identified by surveying employees about their manager's performance. The survey should be conducted by each manager's supervisor. Managers should also complete the survey to see how their rating compares with that of their staff. Action plans should be established on the basis of the survey results.<sup>10</sup> Such "360-degree" surveys should be managed with caution, however; they may create animosity and foster unhealthy relationships between management and staff.
- **Physical working conditions.** This refers to the physical characteristics and safety of the workplace, such as space, equipment, noise levels, parking accommodations, and cleanliness.
- **Scheduling.** This refers to opportunities for varied scheduling, vacation time, shift rotation, job sharing, flexible hours, and part-time work.
- **Motivation.** Extrinsic motivators for change (such as salary, promotion, and recognition) can affect behavior, but they cannot change values and attitudes.<sup>17</sup> In the workplace, change occurs most readily when people are motivated by the desire to bring their professional activities in line with their personal and professional values and beliefs. Living vision and value statements offer employees an opportunity to shape an inspiring organizational culture. Although each employee's motivations will be different, some theories of motivation can help managers understand what contributes to job satisfaction. Maslow's<sup>14</sup> hierarchy of needs, for example, states that employees will be happiest when they are working toward self-actualization, which requires that their more basic needs for security, esteem, belonging, and knowledge be satisfied first. Herzberg et al.'s<sup>18</sup> motivation/hygiene theory explains that employees cannot be motivated by the "hygiene" aspects of their work (organization policies, supervision, salary, peer relations, and working conditions), but that dissatisfaction with those aspects can interfere with motivating factors (the work itself, responsibility, achievement, recognition, and advancement).
- **Exit interview.** An interview should be scheduled with a director of the department, the human resources department, and the exiting employee. The director should ask in-depth questions to identify why the employee is leaving. The exit interview should explore the employee's opinion of the company, department, his or her direct manager as well as any other issues the employee may have for leaving. Pharmacy managers should validate and share this information with the appropriate management staff to decrease the likelihood that another employee may leave for a similar reason.<sup>14</sup>

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## Appendix—Sample Questions to Ask of Job Candidates<sup>2</sup>

### Questions for Experienced Pharmacists and Technicians

- How did you become interested in pharmacy?
- What skills or traits do you think a pharmacist needs to be successful?
- What is the single greatest contribution you have made in your present (or most recent) position?
- What is something you have recommended or tried in your present (or most recent) position that did not work? Why didn't it?
- How are you evaluated in your present (most recent) job?
- What would your present (most recent) employer say are your strong points? Your weak points?
- Why did you (do you want to) leave your last (present) job?

- Do you prefer working on a team or alone? Why?
- What part of the job did you like the best and least?

#### Questions for Recent College of Pharmacy Graduates

- What was your most rewarding college experience?
- Why did you want to study pharmacy?
- What would you change about your college experience if you could?
- Do you think your grades accurately reflect your academic achievements?
- What subjects did you like most and least? Why?

#### General Questions

- What qualities are you looking for in your next supervisor?
- What supervisory style do you think you have?
- What are your long-term career goals?
- How does this position fit in with your long-term career goals?
- What are you looking for in your next position that has been lacking in previous positions?

#### Subjects About Which You May Not Ask

- Race,
- National origin,
- Religion,

- Age,
- Marital or family status,
- Child care arrangements or childbearing plans,
- Arrest records (although convictions related to drug use would be appropriate),
- Credit rating and other financial information (unless the position involves financial responsibilities),
- Military discharge status, unless resulting from a military conviction, and
- General information that would point out handicaps or health problems unrelated to job performance.

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