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Research

Influence of salary on faculty recruitment and retention: current pharmacy faculty salaries relative to past faculty, community practitioners, and new hires

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Abstract

Objectives: To examine faculty and practitioner salary over time and to examine the evidence for the existence of faculty salary compression.
Methods: Salary data were extracted from the American Association of Colleges of Pharmacy (AACP) Faculty Profile salary reports from 1975–2008 and from Drug Topics, and then corrected for inflation.
Results: Faculty salaries have increased over time, although not as much as practitioner compensation. The gap between new and experienced assistant professors closed. Salary inversion was found. Practitioner-heavy faculty disciplines showed more compression. Academic year positions showed more inversion. Dean salary increased at the highest rate.
Conclusions: Overall faculty compensation has improved. Faculty salary inversion exists and the existence of faculty salary compression is indisputable. Associates suffered the largest relative reduction in salary across faculty ranks. Job dissatisfaction because of inadequate salary is a likely factor in the current shortage of faculty directly as a source of job dissatisfaction, and indirectly via faculty with high levels of job dissatisfaction influencing potential future faculty in a negative manner.

Keywords: Pharmacy faculty; Salary; Job satisfaction; Salary compression; Faculty shortage

Providing for an adequate number of qualified faculty to meet the growing needs of the profession of pharmacy is a matter of considerable concern.[1–3] The ongoing shortage of pharmacy practitioners has led the pharmacy education community to mobilize resources to increase productive capacity through the creation of additional schools and colleges of pharmacy, as well as the expansion of existing institutions. Vacant positions in pharmacy education were reported to be 11% in 2006, and predicted to rise to 20% by 2010.[4] Key issues identified as affecting the recruitment and retention of pharmacy faculty include the aging faculty and rate of retirement, fewer professional students seeking an academic career pathway, alternative career pathways for faculty members, changes in demographics, and increased nonacademic salaries.[5,6]

The role of salary in faculty recruitment and retention is especially interesting. It is unclear whether considerations of salary have comparable influence when the decision under consideration is to remain in a current position (retention) or choose between two competing academic positions and/or career pathways (recruitment). When considering new faculty recruitment, a complicating factor has been the increase in nonacademic pharmacist compensation in the highly competitive market for practitioners. As a result, when weighing the relative appeal of pharmacy career paths in practice or education, new graduates must consider disparities in compensation as a factor in the decision-making

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process. Differences in starting salary may be of particular relevance for faculty disciplines where a majority of faculty members have pharmacy professional degrees. Examples of disciplines with large numbers of members licensed to practice pharmacy include pharmacy practice (95%) and social and administrative sciences (65%).[5] The finding that turnover rates in pharmacy practice are higher than those for the basic sciences is suggestive of such an association.[7] One consequence of higher salaries for nonacademic pharmacists is that starting salaries for newly hired faculty seem to be increasing. This introduces the possibility that salary compression may occur.

Salary is a factor in faculty retention because it is a component of job satisfaction. However, the literature suggests that the role salary plays in job satisfaction is a relatively minor one, especially in higher professional jobs where the opportunities for self-actualization are the primary determinants of satisfaction.[8] Herzberg's seminal work in this area differentiated determinants of job satisfaction into motivators (factors that contribute to job satisfaction) and hygiene (factors contributing to job dissatisfaction). Job satisfaction factors could be categorized as intrinsic (task functions) or extrinsic (organizational factors, including social components and tangible rewards for performance, which include pay, promotion, and status).[9,10] In this conceptual framework, salary is an extrinsic, hygiene factor—a positive perception of adequate salary provides minor (if any) impact on job satisfaction, but rather prevents or reduces job dissatisfaction.[11] Therefore, salary is not a substantial source of job satisfaction, but adequate salary is important in preventing job dissatisfaction. Salary, therefore, is not likely to be a major factor in turnover unless faculty members consider their salary to be inadequate.

Over time, the rich and stimulating rewards of an academic career in pharmacy were perceived as being so overwhelmingly positive that concerns for educator compensation must therefore be secondary. This traditional perspective on income is summarized in a 2001 report by the chair of the American Association of Colleges of Pharmacy (AACP) Council of Faculties: "I think that most, if not all, of us that have made a career of academia relish the academic life and find that there are many rewards beyond strictly the monetary rewards. All of us want to earn and receive a reasonable salary and provide for our families. *However . . .* " (italics added).[12] Dr. Currie then enjoins faculty to introduce students to the joys and frustrations of the academic life. Discussion of salary may be to some extent culturally objectionable within the pharmacy education community. The 1995 report of the AACP Task Force on Recruitment and Retention prescribed specific measures to enhance intrinsic sources of job satisfaction but did not argue for any measures to enhance extrinsic sources of job satisfaction.[13] Apparently, 15 years ago many pharmacy academics considered self-actualization possible in the academic life so rewarding that the level of compensation, although not totally ignored, was a matter of relatively minor importance. Comforting as this may be, especially to those with administrative responsibilities, there are a number of reasons to suspect that compensation either has become more important as a factor influencing pharmacy faculty recruitment and retention, or that there are unique aspects of the pharmacy academic career such that compensation plays a larger role in career choice and job satisfaction than it does in other high-level occupations. In any case, although individuals drawn to the academic career path are not primarily driven by aspirations of wealth, even the most idealistic faculty member is to some degree motivated by economic considerations. Salary, as part of the compensation of an academic career, must play a role in career choices and direction. In the face of a growing and serious shortage of qualified faculty, every factor that may enhance the number of faculty should be examined.

First, when considering the issue of new faculty recruitment, the concern may be more about career choice than job satisfaction. This is particularly relevant when considering junior faculty, who can morph from the faculty role to the practice role with relative ease. In addition to the ease with which junior faculty may switch to a practice career, it should also be recognized that the intrinsic rewards of practice, although different from those of academe, must be considered comparable in magnitude (especially for hospital-based clinical practitioners), which is the alterative for many potential faculty members in pharmacy practice.[14–18] This equality between intrinsic rewards may then leave considerations of compensation with a disproportionate role in influencing career choice. The junior faculty member's level of career flexibility may then make extrinsic organizational rewards (salary, fringe benefits, promotion, etc.) more important in the choice than the role they typically play in job satisfaction. Academic administrators are then forced to increase starting salaries offered to new faculty members to compete with the increasingly competitive market for new practitioners.

Second, when considering faculty retention, offering salaries the faculty member perceives to be inadequate is something to be avoided. However, salary as an absolute number may not be that important. When the nature of extrinsic rewards is examined, it is our opinion that feedback on performance stands out as one factor that pharmacy faculty may not receive in adequate quantities, because the great variation in tasks performed and often subjective nature of the work make the provision of detailed feedback quite difficult. Especially when the subjective issue of teaching effectiveness is considered, definable measures of performance may be difficult to delineate. If, for this population, salary is not only regarded as an independent extrinsic organizational reward, but also as contributing to other components of extrinsic sources of job satisfaction—such as recognition, status, and value to the organization—its importance might be higher than would normally be associated with professional jobs. AACP's annual survey of faculty salaries may be a contributing factor to the impor-