

Job Turnover Intentions Among Certified Pharmacy Technicians

Shane P. Desselle

ABSTRACT

Objective: To describe the job withdrawal intentions of a nationwide sample of Certified Pharmacy Technicians (CPhTs).

Design: Cross-sectional descriptive design.

Setting: A random sample of 3,200 CPhTs whose names and contact information were acquired from the Pharmacy Technician Certification Board.

Interventions: Mailed survey.

Main Outcome Measures: Responses to questions eliciting job withdrawal intentions, reasons for remaining/staying with the employer, and various quality of worklife attitudes. Employment intentions were regressed over quality of worklife and practice environment variables in a forward-conditional logistic regression procedure.

Results: Nearly 4 in 5 respondents indicated intentions to remain with the current employer during the next 12 months. Relationships with coworkers, good benefits, and work schedule were frequently cited as reasons to stay. Poor salary, lack of advancement opportunity, and insufficient staffing were cited frequently as factors among those indicating intentions to leave. Mean hourly wages differed among respondents with intention to leave due to salary, those not citing salary as a reason to remain or leave, and those citing salary as a reason for staying. Intention to remain was associated with higher pay, perceived employer support, number of years with the current employer, and lower career turnover intentions, with organizational commitment acting as a powerful mediator for all of the variables.

Conclusion: Differences in CPhTs' future employment intentions were described more comprehensively by perceptions of the employing organization than by perceptions of managers/supervisors and coworkers or personal/work environment variables. Implications for pharmacy organizations are discussed.

Keywords: Pharmacy technicians, job turnover intention, organizational support, careers.

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Shane P. Desselle, BPharm, PhD, is Associate Professor, Mylan School of Pharmacy, Duquesne University, Pittsburgh, Pa.

Correspondence: Shane P. Desselle, PhD, Mylan School of Pharmacy, Duquesne University, Bayer Learning Center, #308, Pittsburgh, PA 15282. Fax: 412-396-5130. E-mail: desselle@duq.edu

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Recent estimates of the hyperdemand¹ for medications and pharmacist services have focused considerable attention on organizational or employer commitment levels among pharmacy professionals. Having an adequate supply of manpower is of primary concern in community and hospital settings, as opportunities become more plentiful for pharmacists to gain employment within settings such as the pharmaceutical industry, managed care, consulting, and government.²

Recent work in the area of pharmacy manpower has contributed greatly to our understanding of pharmacists' attitudes toward quality of worklife and helped to explain their withdrawal intentions.^{2,3} Knowledge of pharmacist withdrawal intentions can assist employing organizations and managers to reduce costly turnover. But similar issues must be considered for pharmacy technicians as well. The roles of pharmacy technicians in the delivery of pharmacy care continue to expand, particularly as prescription volumes increase and as pharmacists attempt to delegate dispensing tasks. Technicians' routine involvement in medication preparation and customer service are critical to patient welfare and to pharmacy.

AT A GLANCE

Synopsis: In this national survey, how Certified Pharmacy Technicians (CPhTs) perceived their employing organizations accounted for differences in job turnover intentions more accurately than did their own personal characteristics or perceptions of their supervisor and coworkers. Slightly more than 20% of 835 CPhTs expressed an intention to leave their jobs during the next 12 months. Lack of advancement opportunity and poor salary were the reasons given most frequently for intending to leave. Among CPhTs intending to remain in their positions, good benefits and coworker relationships were the most frequently cited reasons for staying. Regression analysis on practice-related and quality of worklife variables suggested that organizational commitment acts as a powerful mediator of the factors involved in job turnover intention.

Analysis: CPhTs are important assets in the delivery of pharmacy care; their routine involvement in medication preparation, inventory management, and customer service contributes greatly to patient welfare and to pharmacy. Job turnover is costly to employers. In the current climate of increased demand for pharmacists' services, increased medication use, and increased overall costs, a stable workforce contributes to an organization's efficiency while reducing unnecessary costs. Pharmacy technicians are in limited supply, and the number of CPhTs is even more limited. By understanding the reasons for CPhT turnover, pharmacy organizations can better address the deficiencies that lead to it.

Recent years have seen technicians more involved in managing inventory, scheduling, billing, narcotics control, and even patient triage.⁴ Problems in commitment among technicians may reduce an organization's efficiency and perhaps compromise its ability to serve patients.

While unstudied in pharmacy technicians, commitment has been explored extensively among pharmacists and employees in clerical, technical, sales, and other occupations. One study indicates a reduction in commitment among pharmacists in the presence of perceived future uncertainty and role ambiguity.⁵ The deleterious effect of these role stressors may be overcome with adequate support from the employing organization and the employee's immediate supervisor.⁵ The association of demographic variables with commitment and turnover intentions remains somewhat unclear, with gender, age, and racial/ethnic background offering contrary evidence in various studies.⁵⁻⁷ Somewhat more consistent is evidence that practice setting and position is associated with commitment and turnover intentions.^{5,6} Rate of pay has been implicated in the formation of employer commitment beliefs among a wide range of occupations,^{8,9} but has not been studied extensively in pharmacy.

Pharmacy technician commitment may be considered within the context of professionalization. Currently, the profession is debating the standardizing of educational and training requirements and designating a hierarchy of levels and resultant roles for technicians.¹⁰ Certification is seen as key in this process. Many pharmacists have become advocates of technician certification, believing that the stringent examination and recertification requirements will facilitate higher levels of competency.¹¹ The Pharmacy Technician Certification Board (PTCB) already has certified more than 185,000 applicants,¹² a figure that includes student pharmacists and other individuals not likely to be currently working as pharmacy technicians. The Bureau of Labor and Statistics estimates the total number of pharmacy technicians in 2003 at 226,200.¹³ The proportion of pharmacy technicians who are certified continues to grow; moreover, some states require certification for registration and are contemplating it as a prerequisite for practice.¹⁰

Objectives

The purpose of this study was to describe the job withdrawal intentions of a nationwide sample of CPhTs. Specific objectives were to estimate the proportion of CPhTs intending to leave their current employers, identify their most frequent reasons for doing so, determine whether differences in employee demographics, work-related variables, and rate of pay in any way influenced turnover intentions, and uncover any relationships between job turnover intention and various quality of worklife attitudes.

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