Specialty Clinical Pharmacist Career Ladder to Support Growth and Professional Advancement

Mandy Chen, PharmD, CSP; Amelia Persico, PharmD, MBA, BCACP, CSP; Manpreet Badwal, PharmD, CSP

Scan Me

BACKGROUND

In 2024, the Clinical Services Department at Shields Health Solutions (Shields) implemented a career ladder in response to feedback from the ambulatory clinical pharmacist and clinical pharmacist teams indicating a desire for growth beyond existing managerial promotional opportunities. The program launched with the first promotional tier, Ambulatory Clinical Pharmacist II (ACPII)/Clinical Pharmacist II (CPII), in September 2024.

DESCRIPTION

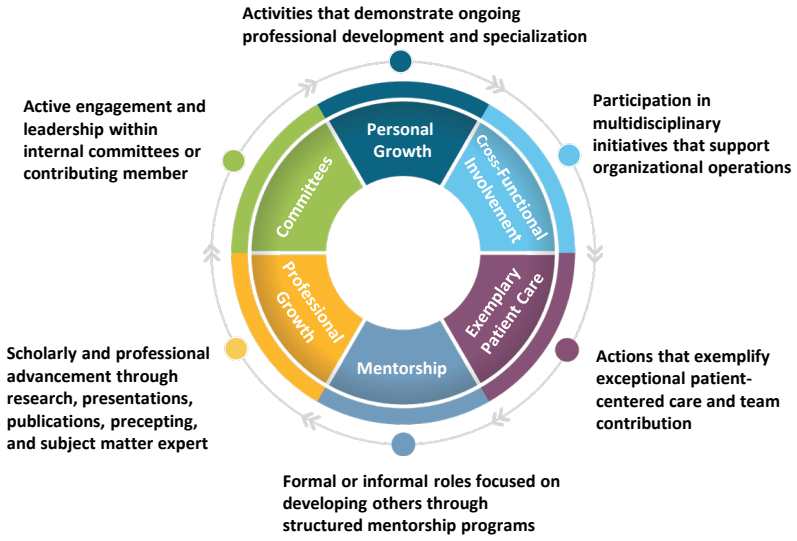
A workgroup of clinical leaders developed the criteria for promotion (**Table 1**) based on demonstrated performance, clinical impact, leadership engagement, interdisciplinary collaboration, project contributions, and participation in mentorship of new hires.

Table 1: Eligibility Criteria

Eligibility Criteria	CPII/ACPII	CPIII/ACPIII
Certified Specialty Pharmacist (CSP) Certification	X	X
Minimum of two consecutive annual performance review ratings of "exceeds expectations"	X	
Engagement in activities contributing to personal or organizational growth	X	X
Board certification or advanced degree		X
Two consecutive performance review ratings of "exceeds expectations" as ACPII/CPII		X

Clinical pharmacists must maintain ongoing involvement in the various domains to retain promotional status (Figure 1). To support advancement and incentivize sustained engagement in the absence of a merit-based salary increase, a comprehensive non-monetary benefits package was developed.

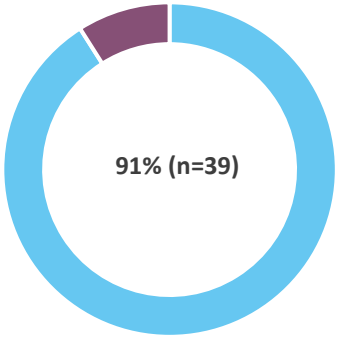
Figure 1: Ongoing Involvement



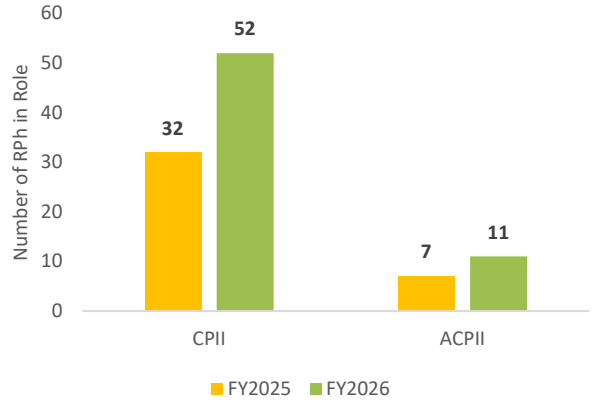
EVALUATION

Following implementation of the career ladder, 39 of the 43 eligible pharmacists participated in the program (91% participation rate among eligible staff). 63% of pharmacists used benefits in FY25, including 25 office stipends, attendance at 3 in-state conferences and 7 out-of-state conferences, participation in 11 pharmacy-related professional development activities and 2 non-pharmacy professional development activities, 14 professional membership fee stipends, and 5 instances of volunteer time off.

Program Participation Rate



Clinical Pharmacist Career Ladder Growth

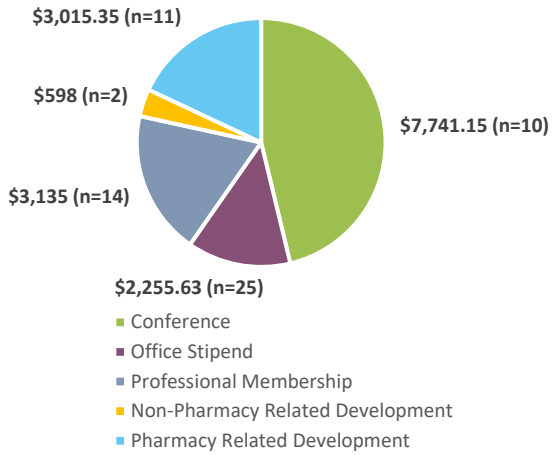


Career Ladder Program Impact

$429
Annual Cost Per Individual

63%
Benefit Utilization

Total Cost of Benefits Utilized in FY25



CONCLUSIONS

The implementation of a structured Clinical Pharmacist Career Ladder demonstrated a feasible and impactful approach for recognizing excellence, promoting professional development, and enhancing engagement. Early workforce outcomes suggest a positive impact on retention, with an average retention rate of 93.4% from 2023–2026 and 96.2% from 2025–2026. By establishing transparent advancement criteria and meaningful incentives, the career ladder fosters sustained engagement, leadership development, and contributions beyond traditional role expectations.