

Not All Pathways are Clear: Challenges and Opportunities for the Pharmacy and Clinical Lab Workforces

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Pharmacy Workforce

HWRC-Allied Health: Pharmacy Workforce Studies

- Assessing the Size and Scope of the Pharmacist Workforce in the US
- The Pharmacist Workforce in the U.S.: Supply, Distribution, Education Pathways, and State Responses to Emergency Surges in Demand
- **Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Community Pharmacist Patient Care and Future Workforce Needs**
- Envisioning New Career Pathways for Pharmacy Technicians
- Understanding Pharmacy School Enrollment Decline

Background

- Community pharmacies (>60K) among most accessible health care sites.
 - People visit more often than their primary care provider
- Services go beyond medication dispensing
 - Medication optimization, care management, wellness/prevention, patient education.
- Called upon to respond to critical public health needs during pandemic with expanded practice authority for pharmacists, pharmacy technicians, and pharmacy students.
 - COVID-19 testing, vaccination, and therapeutics.

Study Goal and Methods

Goal: To describe the community pharmacy workforce's response to the COVID-19 pandemic

Participants: Convenience sample of community pharmacy and pharmacy association leaders across US

Data collection: Key informant interviews from Jan-May 2022 using semi-structured interview guide

Data analysis: Rapid content analysis of interview notes

Results

Theme 1:

Patient care at community pharmacies focused on fulfilling COVID-19 response needed

Theme 2:

Pharmacists' history as immunizers and scope of practice expansions accelerated COVID-19 response

Theme 3:

Workforce shortages and workload increase impeded COVID-19 response and contributed to burnout

Theme 4:

Maintaining community pharmacy workforce's readiness critical to future emergency preparedness & response

Source: Bacci et al, "Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on the Community Pharmacy Workforce," Medical Care Research and Review.2023. <https://doi.org/10.1177/10775587231204101>

Results

Theme 2: Pharmacists' history as immunizers and scope of practice expansions accelerated COVID-19 response

“There isn’t one [industry] that could have responded in the way that community pharmacies responded... states that went all in on pharmacy early had an easier time rolling out [the COVID-19] vaccine and doing it at a pace that mattered.” (Interview #8)

“I have a technician that became certified to [administer] vaccines... It’s really freed up [time] and we would never have been able to do as many vaccines as we have done without technicians being able to [administer vaccines].” (Interview #12)

Results

Theme 3: Workforce shortages and workload increase impeded COVID-19 response and contributed to burnout

“We’re always chronically low on trained pharmacy technicians... With the opportunity for technicians [to administer vaccines], the timing was not exceptional because we were asking them to do training while working exceptional number of hours in a very stressful environment...”
(Interview #14)

“It’s [the need to receive] payment for services... if pharmacists can be paid for their expertise, the public would benefit, patients would benefit, the pharmacy profession would benefit... we wouldn’t be on such thin margins... I think well-being would be better because we can be staffed appropriately.” (Interview #7)

Source: Bacci et al, “Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on the Community Pharmacy Workforce,” Medical Care Research and Review.2023. <https://doi.org/10.1177/10775587231204101>

Take aways for career paths

- Pharmacy technicians' scope of practice expanded during the pandemic, and play important supportive role to pharmacists,
 - Yet limited career pathway opportunities and stressful work environments leading to high turnover.
- Pharmacists' scope of practice also expanded during the pandemic
 - Yet face policy and reimbursement limitations in ability to practice at top of license
 - High burnout reported due to increased pressures due to consolidation, focus on dispensing, and turnover in their staff

Clinical Lab Workforce

HWRC-Allied Health: Clinical Lab Workforce Studies

- The Clinical Laboratory Workforce in the U.S.: Supply, Distribution, Education Pathways, and State Responses to the COVID-19 Emergency
- **Finding a Career Path into the Clinical Laboratory Workforce**

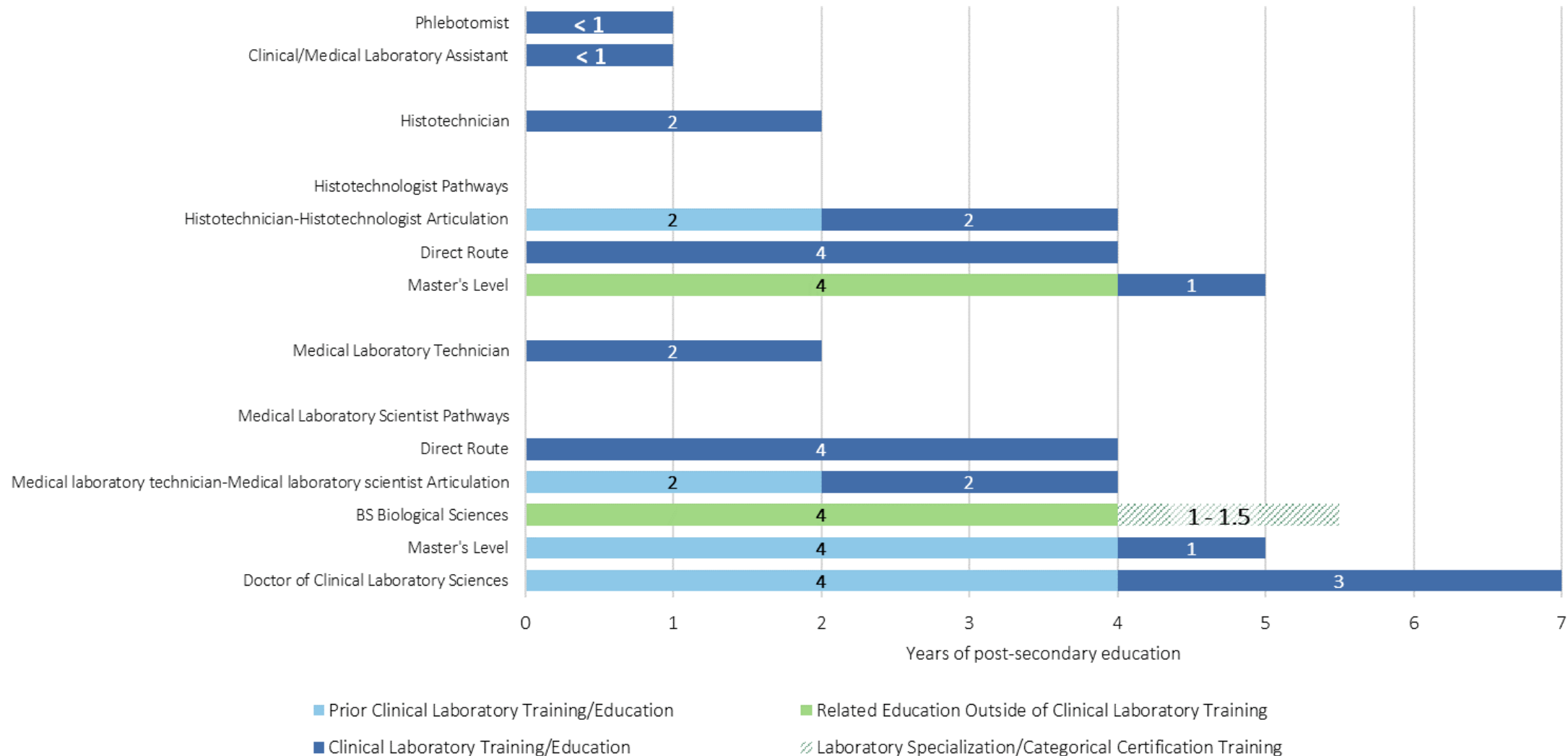
Non-HRSA Funded Study

- Identifying the Barriers and Facilitators to Strengthen the Clinical Lab Professional Workforce

Background

- The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) estimates the size of the workforce to be approximately 482,300¹⁻² over a range of occupations (2022).
- The COVID-19 pandemic has pushed the clinical laboratory and its workforce into the spotlight.
- Key challenge – many jobs available yet unclear pathways into these careers.

Multiple Education and Training Pathways to Clinical Lab Careers



Study Goal and Questions

Goal: To learn about career pathways into the clinical lab workforce

Questions:

1. What have been the career pathways of workers to their current employment?
2. What facilitators supported pathways of clinical lab worker to their current jobs?
3. What are the future career plans among clinical lab workers and what barriers do they foresee to achieving those plans?

Conceptual Model for Study

Factors influencing entry into laboratory occupations

Structural Factors

- Socio-demographics (e.g., age, gender, race/ethnicity, education, community exposure, geographic region)

Pre-Lab Career Factors

- Pathway to current occupation
- Education/training history, including Lab-related education/training history and, and on-the-job training opportunities
- Visibility of career options

Opportunities/experiences for career movement and advancement

Prior/Initial Lab Work Benefits and Challenges

- Experience to date (e.g., flexible hours, options for different work roles, professional development opportunities and resources, leadership/managerial opportunities, work environment, mentor availability)

Current Lab Work Characteristics

- (e.g., job title, work setting, location, hours worked, years employed, wages and benefits) and current flexible hours, leadership/managerial opportunities, work environment

Likely future career movement

Career Outlook

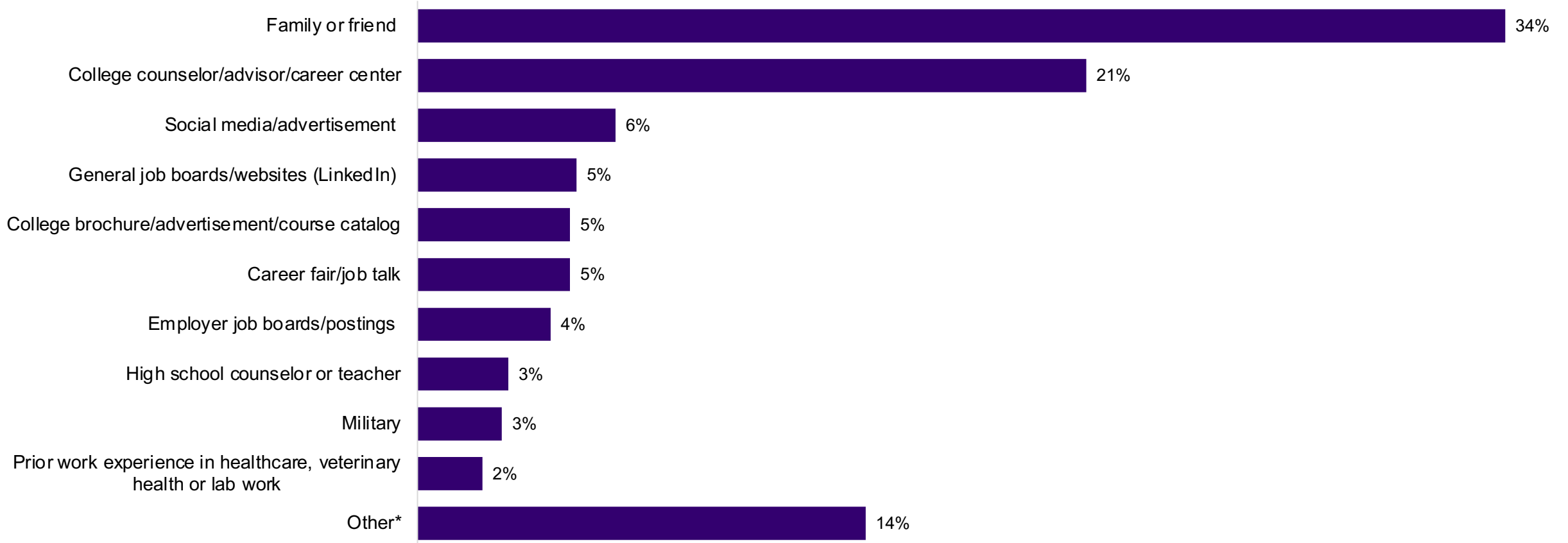
- (e.g., intent to stay, desire for additional training, role of (actual or perceived) debt burden, actual opportunities for advancement/change)

Methods

- Target Population: Phlebotomists, Histotechnicians, Histotechnologists, Cytologists, Medical laboratory technicians (MLTs), Medical laboratory scientists (MLSs)
- Analysis approach: Developed survey and conducted descriptive analysis of MLS to start (initial focus on “current MLS”)
- Data collection: May-June 2023
- Total responses: 1,514

Preliminary Findings: Motivations for Entry into Profession

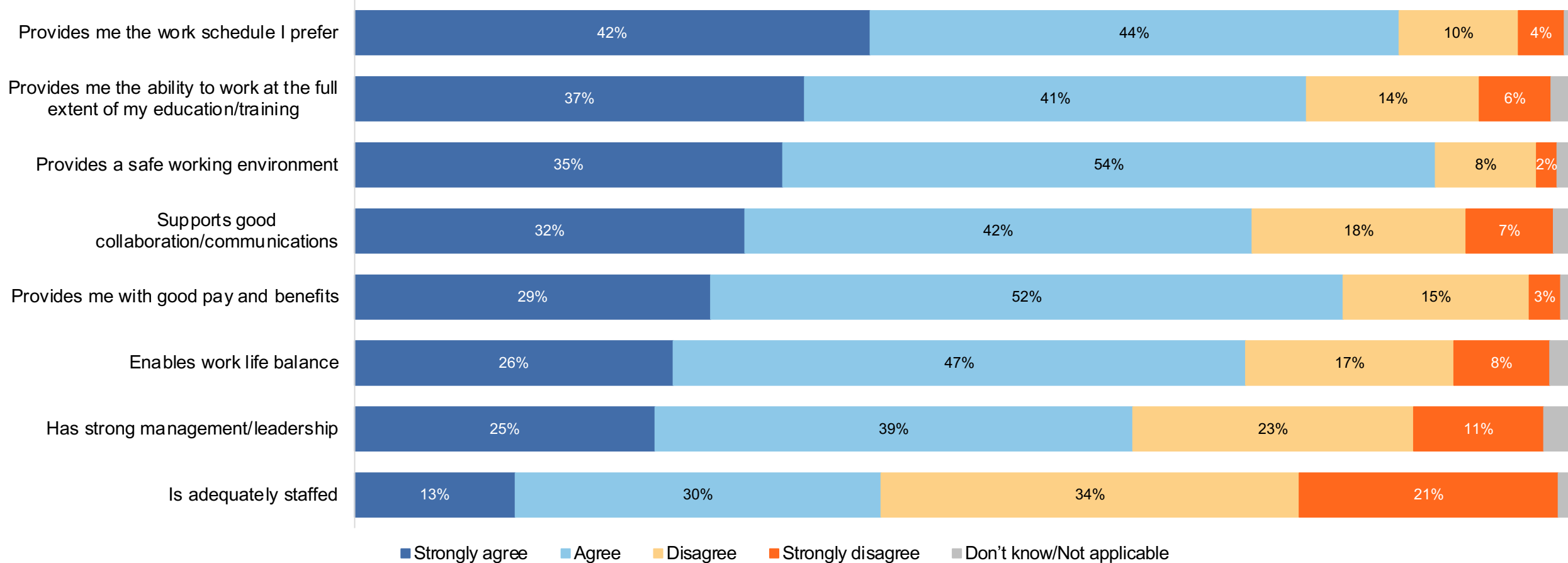
MLS Sources Exposure for Entry into Laboratory Profession



Participants could select more than one option

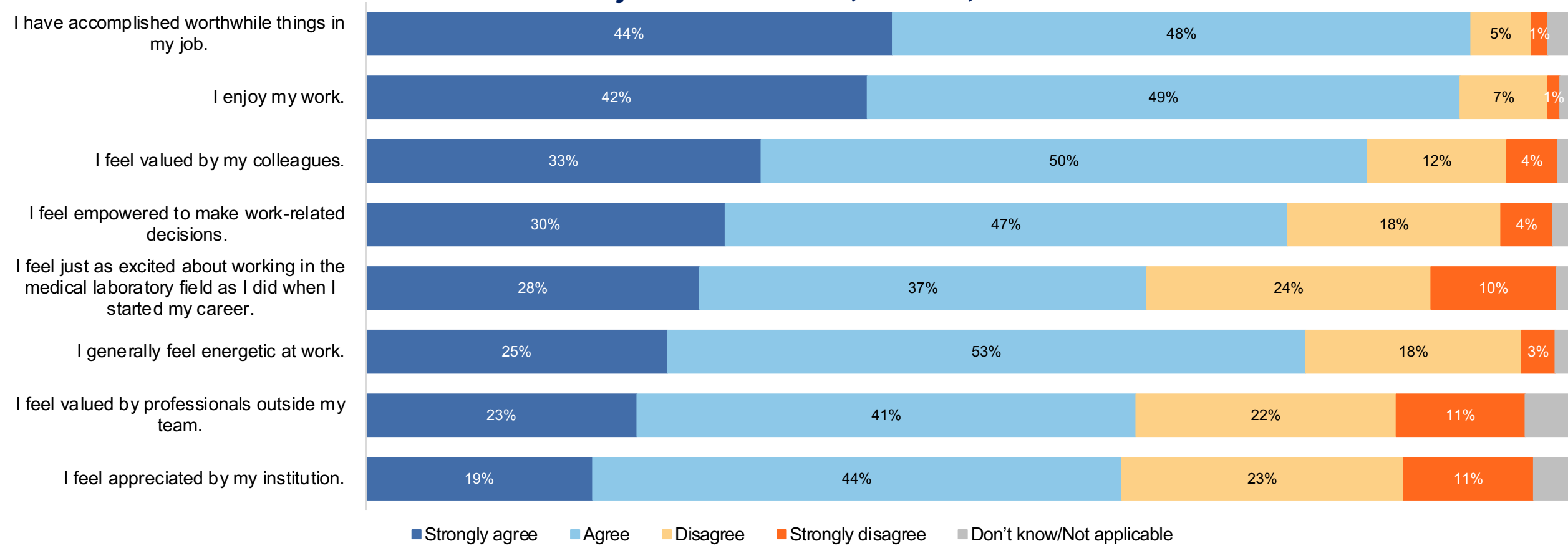
Preliminary Findings: Job Satisfaction and Career Outlook

My current job...



Preliminary Findings: Job Satisfaction and Career Outlook

Current job environment, culture, and benefits



Take aways for career paths

- Clinical lab jobs are largely invisible to the public
 - Many opportunities but pathways to clinical lab jobs remain unclear
- High level of work satisfaction among clinical lab workers
 - Yet lack of recognition/understanding by management about their roles
 - Staffing shortages create pressures for this workforce

Final Thoughts

- Pharmacy and clinical lab jobs became more visible during the pandemic – both groups had expanded scope of practice.
- Steps to pharmacy jobs more clear than clinical lab jobs, but both share common challenge of lack of career pathways for those in jobs.
- Given declining student enrollment in pharmacy schools, our team aims to understand the drivers of this decline.
- For clinical lab jobs, we aim to map out the many pathways to these jobs.

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