Factors Influencing Career Aspirations of Third-Year Pharmacy Students

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Background

The focus of pharmacy practice has seen significant changes in the last 15–20 years, from drug product preparation and distribution to patient-centered care. Patient-centered care practice was clearly defined by Hepler and Strand in 1990 as pharmaceutical care.\(^1\) Subsequent to this, many pharmacy educators and pharmacy organizations decided to make pharmaceutical care the primary focus of pharmacists’ activities. The evolution of this concept has resulted in pharmacists’ involvement of Medication Therapy Management (MTM) that was formally established under the Medicare Part D prescription drug benefit in 2006.\(^2\) In 2010, the Patient protection and Affordable Care Act was passed, and many pharmacy experts believed that pharmacists should and would become even more involved in drug therapy management as a result.\(^3\) As a result, pharmacists were now being included in the newly created Patient Centered Medical Homes to address the challenges of medication therapy management in primary care medical practice.\(^4\) Pharmacists have recently been included in discussions on collaborative practice arrangements physicians in pediatrics and pharmacists who treat patients with diabetes to provide expertise in medication management.\(^5\) Now even physicians assistants are recognizing that pharmacists can provide valuable expertise in the management of drug therapy.\(^6\) At the same time, patient care services that include biometric screenings and comprehensive medications reviews are being established by grocery store chains that allow students to experience clinical services in the community pharmacy.\(^7\) Student delivery of MTM during their APPEs allows them to apply skills learned in the PharmD curriculum and is perceived by them as a valuable service for patients.\(^8\)

Objective

To determine factors influencing career aspirations of third year pharmacy students.

Methods

A survey instrument was developed to collect data from third year pharmacy students on their pharmacy practice experience for pay. Variables collected were categorized as current pharmacy practice setting for pay, attitudes and opinions regarding the work setting and demographics. Surveys were administered in five consecutive years beginning in 2006. The backward elimination algorithm of stepwise regression identified the best fit model influencing pharmacy student career aspirations.

Results

The response rate over five years was 70.0% (561 out of 802). At least one pharmacy practice experience for pay was reported by 509 of 561 respondents (90.7%). Sixty-six percent reported practicing for pay in a community pharmacy, and current practice experience for pay being favorable (beta = 0.146, p < 0.001), with 56.2% indicating a chain/grocery store/merchandiser pharmacy and 9.8% indicating an independent pharmacy. Nearly 27% practiced in a hospital pharmacy for pay and 7.1% reported other pharmacy practice experiences for pay. Students with practice experience for pay were asked to complete eight items regarding their attitudes and opinions of these experiences. The regression model (Table 1) had an adjusted R² value of 0.54. The most significant factors were: seeing oneself having a fulfilling career (beta = 0.459, p < 0.001), an optimal work schedule (beta = 0.358, p < 0.001) and instructional pathway (campus or distance) are shown in Table 2 and by instructional pathway (campus or distance) are shown in Table 3.

Implications/Conclusions

Expectation of a fulfilling career appears to be the most significant factor influencing aspirations of future work place setting for students, and faculty should emphasize this in their interactions with students.

References

2. Law AL. (Omamoto MO, Brook K. Ready, willing, and able to provide MTM services?: A survey of community pharmacists in the USA, Res Soc Adm Pharm. 2009;5:376-81.