

Increasing Importance of Clinical Research Opportunities for Pharmacy Students



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Abstract

Pharmacy students have many opportunities for extracurricular activities to enhance their learning experiences and prepare them for their roles as clinicians upon graduation. Pursuing a pharmacy practice residency or post-graduate education upon graduation from a pharmacy program is highly sought after by a large percentage of pharmacy graduates. Achieving the goal of obtaining a residency or fellowship is highly competitive and requires the pharmacy student applicant to appear well-rounded. Pursuant to this, many students become involved in internships, leadership roles, and increasingly, clinical research opportunities. While the role of pharmacists in clinical research is still developing, many pharmacy practitioners are involved in research in some capacity and pharmacy residency and fellowship candidates are typically expected to complete a clinical research project prior to obtaining their certification. This supports the idea that involving pharmacy students in clinical research opportunities is becoming increasingly important for both their post-graduate applications and their experiences prior to becoming practitioners.

Keywords: Pharmacy student; Clinical research; Residency; Fellowship; Pharmacists; Pharmaceutical industry; School of pharmacy

Abbreviations: PharmD: Doctor of Pharmacy

Introduction

Pharmacists are increasingly becoming involved in clinical research as part of their roles in health systems, academia, the pharmaceutical industry, and other settings. It is not yet an expectation that pharmacy students participate in clinical research, though it is helpful when applying to post-graduate opportunities such as pharmacy practice residencies or fellowships in the pharmaceutical industry. Additionally, it is recognized that research experience provides students with skills in critical thinking and analysis necessary to overcome obstacles in their areas of expertise in the workforce and as they pursue lifelong learning efforts [1]. To this end, it has even been proposed to include research curriculum content in pharmacy and/or pre-pharmacy programs.

Providing clinical research content in the PharmD curriculum serves multiple purposes in the preparation of new clinicians. Given the background knowledge and training of pharmacy students, they are poised to take on careers in pharmaceutical or clinical research but often are unaware of such opportunities. A study completed by Overholser, et al. evaluated student interest in pursuing a career path in research following a 2-credit hour elective course in clinical research compared to students who did

not participate in the elective. The study concluded that students who completed the elective had greater interest in pursuing such a career path and adding curriculum focused on clinical research may be helpful in aiding students' exploration of that practice area [2].

Furthermore, if increased interest in clinical research related careers is an outcome of introducing clinical research material to a pharmacy curriculum, it may also advance interest in experiences and opportunities in clinical research while still completing didactic or experiential coursework. One such method to increase opportunities available to students would be to match students with investigators related to the college or surrounding institutions who would be willing to engage students in their work. Goodlet and Nailor detail tips and best practices to involving pharmacy students in clinical research by identifying specific projects, clarifying research goals and expectations, checking student work, and disseminating research [3].

Conclusion

The advantage of participating in clinical research experiences for pharmacy students is driving the need for, and

importance of, clinical research opportunities being available and easily accessible for pharmacy students during their didactic and experiential education. In many cases, it is the motivation of the individual student which drives the student to participate or become involved in clinical research projects as part of their training and extracurricular involvement. It is our opinion that this involvement should be emphasized early on in pharmacy education and then supported by the appropriate resources at the college or school of pharmacy.

References

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