Academic Pharmacy: Creating and translating new knowledge to improve health

Issue:
Colleges and schools of pharmacy are home to a significant enterprise that spans the research spectrum from discovery of new knowledge to the translation of that knowledge. Faculty at colleges and schools of pharmacy engage in both biomedical and educational research. Both areas of research are essential for improving the health of individuals and communities and need sustained federal support.

Recommendations:
- AACP seeks increased funding for federal agency extramural research programs. While fiscal responsibility is essential for bringing the United States back into a pay-as-you-go approach to federal program funding, the erosion of funding for many federal agency extramural research programs places our nation at a competitive disadvantage. New knowledge and translation of that knowledge into productive endeavors has been the basis of these federal programs from their start.
- Due to the compelling public interest in assuring the competence of healthcare professionals, the Department of Education should be directed to pursue the development of a research agenda aimed at determining best-practices associated with health professions education, including those aimed at improving healthcare quality by facilitating team-based, patient-centered care approaches.
- AACP supports increased funding for the National Institutes of Health (NIH) in FY10. In response to the need for increasing the number of clinical scientists, AACP recommends that funding for the clinical scientist loan repayment program be increased. AACP also anticipates continued attention within NIH, through consultation with stakeholders, on increasing the success rates of biomedical and clinical researchers over time.
- The FDA should receive FY10 funding, a portion of which is directed toward development of an extramural research agenda focused on fulfilling its mission of ensuring the safety and efficacy of drug products supported by the research of faculty at health professions education institutions.
- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has a limited extramural research budget that, if enhanced, could yield substantial information on increasing the understanding of public health by health professions students and how this can lead to improved health and reduced disparities for communities and individuals.
- AACP supports congressional efforts to increase the evidence-base upon which healthcare professionals establish their clinical decisions and organize their practice. We support the creation of this evidence-base through comparative effectiveness research.
- The Office of Pharmacy Affairs would benefit from a direct line-item appropriation so that public-private partnerships aimed at improving the quality of care provided at federally qualified health centers can be sustained and expanded.

Background:
Department of Education
The U.S. Department of Education currently supports education research, development and national dissemination activities aimed at determining the effectiveness of educational approaches. In FY08, the Department had $158 million to fund this type of activity. These activities need to be prioritized and adapted to a research agenda that addresses the issues discussed during the hearings of the Spellings Commission on Higher Education.

One of the more productive programs in the Department’s research portfolio is the Fund for the Improvement of Post-Secondary Education (FIPSE). This program currently supports a collaboration among institutes of higher education, including health professions education institutions aimed at developing faculty for effective engagement with communities. FIPSE is a program subject to unstable funding from year to year which clearly impacts its ability to be of consistent benefit to the Department for directing higher education policy.

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<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Funding</th>
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<tr>
<td>FY05</td>
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<td>FY06</td>
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Department of Health and Human Services
National Institutes of Health
Pharmacy faculty are supported in their research by nearly every institute at the NIH. In 2008, pharmacy faculty researchers received more than $260 million in grant support from the NIH. [1] AACP member institutions are concerned, as are other health professions education organizations, of the need to increase the number of biomedical researchers. This concern is supported by an initial grant funding success rate that has never been more than 30 percent in the last decade. [2]

Food and Drug Administration
The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) is looking to academic pharmacy to assure the public has access to a healthcare professional well versed in the science of safety. The need for a healthcare professional to communicate with patients and consumers and translate information relevant throughout the drug life-cycle is a recognized expectation by the FDA of academic pharmacy. Pharmacy faculty recently completed research for the FDA on the effectiveness of labeling changes. The role of the public’s education in recognizing their individual level of risk and participating as full partners in team-based, patient-centered approaches to care is essential. Pharmacy faculty and students provide the FDA with a “go-to” group to create the educational outcomes that will empower patients to be members of the healthcare team. The FDA also supports pharmacy schools working to improve the drug manufacturing process.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
The educational outcomes of a pharmacist’s education include those related to public health. When in community-based positions, pharmacists are frequently providers of first contact. The opportunity to identify potential public health threats through regular interaction with patients provides public health agencies such as the CDC with on-the-ground epidemiologists. Pharmacists support the public health system through the risk identification of patients seeking medications associated with travel-related illnesses. Pharmacy faculty are engaged in CDC-supported research in areas such as immunization delivery, pharmacogenetics in the pharmacy curriculum and inclusion of pharmacists in emergency preparedness.

Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality
Pharmacy faculty are strong partners with the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ). Academic pharmacy researchers are working to develop a sustainable health services research effort among faculty with AHRQ grant support. As partners in the AHRQ Effective Healthcare programs (CERTs, DeCIDE), pharmacy faculty researchers improve the effectiveness of healthcare services. Some of this research will take place through the development of practice-based research networks focused on improving the medication use process. Researchers have assessed the use and availability of health information technology and its relationship to medication errors in critical access hospitals.

Health Resources and Services Administration
Office of Pharmacy Affairs
AACP member institutions are engaged in Office of Pharmacy Affairs (OPA) efforts to improve the quality of care for patients in federally-qualified health centers and entities eligible to participate in the 340B drug discount program [3]. The success of the collaborative is a direct result of past OPA actions linking colleges and schools of pharmacy with federally-qualified health centers. The result of these links has been the establishment of medical homes that improve health outcomes for underserved and disadvantaged patients through the integration of clinical pharmacy services.

For additional information please contact:
Will Lang, MPH
Vice President, Policy and Advocacy
American Association of Colleges of Pharmacy
(703) 739-2330 x1038
wlang@aacp.org

References:
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