Specialization within pharmacy education: a survey of curricular track or concentration offerings

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Background

- According to Accreditation Council for Pharmacy Education (ACPE) Standards 2016, the Doctor of Pharmacy (PharmD) curriculum is designed to produce a scientifically and technically competent pharmacist who can apply their education to provide maximum health care services to patients.1
- Graduates who plan to practice within a specialized area generally pursue post-graduate training to fill the needs gap between the PharmD degree and position requirements.
- Curricular concentrations or tracks have been reported in the pharmacy education literature to provide for specialization within the PharmD curriculum, including geriatrics, research, diabetes, academic, clinical, and global health.2-7
- There is no published data available on what is needed to constitute a curricular track or concentration.

Objectives

- Identify the prevalence and types of different curricular tracks or concentrations within colleges and schools of pharmacy.
- Define the requirements for identified tracks or concentrations.
- Describe the endpoint achieved after completion of a curricular track or concentration.

Methods

- A survey instrument was developed and piloted.
- The survey was distributed electronically via SurveyMonkey to the ACCP Curriculum Special Interest Group (SIG) contact list which is comprised of 165 contacts from 116 individual programs.
- Responses were collected from January to February 2016. Duplicate responses from any individual program were removed so that each program was represented once. Responses were then evaluated via descriptive analysis.

Results

- Figure 1: Current Status of Curricular Track or Concentration Offerings
- Figure 2: Reason Curricular Tracks or Concentrations Are Not Currently Offered
- Figure 3: Types of Curricular Tracks or Concentrations Offered
- Figure 4: Credit Requirements for Offered Curricular Tracks or Concentrations
- Figure 5: Full-Time Faculty Involved and Students Initially Enrolled Per Offered Curricular Track or Concentration
- Figure 6: Design and Endpoints of Reported Curricular Tracks or Concentrations

Discussion

- Contacts from 56 of 116 programs responded to the survey. Although only 21% of respondents reported curricular tracks currently offer specialized curricular tracking, 50% without tracks are considering or planning to implement in the future.
- The most common areas of focus were advanced clinical/ pharmacotherapy (n=6) and pharmacy management/administration (n=6).
- On average, a curricular track or concentration consisted of 6 elective didactic credits, 4 required didactic credits, 1 IPPE credit, 1 to 2 APPE rotations, and no summative project requirement.
- The endpoint of the curricular track or concentration was most often a certificate.
- Programs with curricular tracking most frequently reported either an Associate/Assistant Dean or individual faculty member had oversight of the track and utilized an average of 4.7 faculty members per track.

Conclusion

- Though few schools currently offer curricular tracking, half of respondents without tracks are considering specialized focus areas of study.
- Tracks generally consisted of approximately 10 didactic credits and 7 experiential credits.
- Implementation of curricular tracking involves significant faculty effort which needs to be weighed against anticipated benefits.