A Prescription for Improved Leadership Skills; an Assessment of the PILs Program

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Introduction

With the advancement of the pharmacy profession, there is an emphasis on the systematic development of leadership skills in future practitioners. Despite the importance of these measures, there are limited studies evaluating the impact of peer-to-peer mentorship on the success rate in a PharmD program, both from the perspective of the peer-mentor and the direct beneficiary. The purpose of this study is to evaluate and determine the importance of leadership skills among pharmacy students through a peer-mediated mentorship program.

Objective

The objective of this study is to assess the Pharmacy Initiative Leaders (PILs) program, which is a student organization at the Howard University College of Pharmacy. This study will help to delineate if participation in the PILs program is associated with greater leadership characteristics in participating students. Conducting these types of assessments is a regular part of the College’s Assessment Activities in order to make sure that the College is making opportunities available for students to develop professionally through various activities outside of the classroom as mandated by the Accreditation Council for Pharmacy Education.

Methodology

A cross-sectional study design was utilized in evaluating student attitudes towards a Pharmacy Initiative Leaders (PILs) program and to evaluate the impact of PILs on participation in student organizations. First and second-year students were asked to complete a survey eliciting information on involvement in student organizations and attitudes towards PILs. Involvement in student organizations was ascertained by student self-report in terms of how many student organizations they reported being involved in while in pharmacy school. Leadership ability was assessed by student responses on a series of Likert scale questions. Confounding variables included age, gender, years in pharmacy school, and involvement in student organizations prior to pharmacy school. Information was also gathered about participants’ beliefs, knowledge, and attitudes towards the PILs program. An independent sample t-test was utilized to determine if there was a statistically significant difference between the number of PILs participants versus non-PILs participants involved in student organizations.

Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>35.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>29.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>22.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither Agree Nor Disagree</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>9.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Summary

- Over 115 students completed the survey for a response rate of over 80%.
- Students mentored through the PILs program participated in 2.2 student organizations during pharmacy school, compared to 1.3 student organizations for students not participating in PILs (p=0.005).
- 57% of students who had been mentored through PILs either agreed or strongly agreed that participation in PILs caused them to reflect more on the role they can have in influencing the future of pharmacy.
- 58% of students mentored through PILs indicated agreement with the statement that they have been able to apply something that they learned in PILs toward their professional development.
- 56% of students said that their participation in the PILs program had been professionally rewarding.

Conclusions

Based on this study, it can be concluded that students who participated in a tailored professional development and leadership program for pharmacists called PILs, were significantly more likely to participate in student organizations than those not participating. The vast majority were also likely to recommend that future students participate in the PILs program, demonstrating high favorability of PILs among first and second-year pharmacy students. Further study may be warranted to determine the impact of participation in PILs on career paths.

References