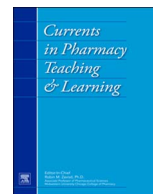




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Research Note

Factors influencing professional state association membership decisions among recent pharmacy graduates

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: State pharmacy association membership levels have remained stagnant in recent years despite active student organization involvement among student pharmacists and an increased number of pharmacy schools producing new pharmacy graduates in the United States. The objective of this project was to examine factors considered by recent pharmacy graduates when deciding to join state pharmacy associations.

Methods: A 16-item cross sectional survey of recent pharmacy graduates collected respondents' demographic profile, professional student organization involvement, association memberships, and membership decision factors.

Results: The most influential factors in membership decisions included continuing education (62.8%), opportunity to advance pharmacy practice (51.1%), email updates (39.4%), and networking opportunities (37.2%). State pharmacy association meeting attendance ($p = 0.004$ and $p = 0.028$ for the Kentucky Society of Health-System Pharmacists and the Kentucky Pharmacists Association respectively), student organization membership ($p = 0.038$), committee service ($p = 0.025$), and state association board participation ($p = 0.021$) during pharmacy education increases the likelihood of membership in state associations.

Conclusions: Early engagement in state pharmacy associations during pharmacy school improves the likelihood of new practitioner membership. Pharmacy schools should engage with state association leaders to promote student committee participation, association board participation, and attendance at state meetings to ensure the continued success of state pharmacy associations.

Introduction

Professional pharmacy associations seek to organize members around a common goal of advancing the practice of pharmacy and improving healthcare. State pharmacy associations serve as a conduit to communicate contemporary issues relevant to practice advancement, and they work in concert with national organizations to advance initiatives at the state and local level. The success of state affiliates in engaging current and new members is essential in supporting the purpose of national associations. Given the

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increased number of pharmacy graduates in the United States,¹ one would expect upward trends in state pharmacy association membership. Instead, state pharmacy associations have experienced stagnant or waning membership levels, especially among new practitioners.

Other professional healthcare societies have reported a significant decline in membership as Generation X (born 1965–1980) and Millennial (born 1981–1997)² graduates join the profession.³ Factors affecting professional society membership decisions reported by other professions include changes in perceived need for mentors, expanded options for continuing education, and new networking paradigms.³ Opportunities for professional networking extend beyond attending local meetings, which may require travel or professional leave, now that social media and virtual networking options exist.⁴

Previous research demonstrates that student involvement in local, state, regional, or national professional associations fosters student leadership and career development and serves as a method to enrich the pharmacy curriculum.^{5,6} When evaluating factors that contribute to student involvement, it has been shown that pharmacy faculty play a vital role in student motivation to actively participate in professional associations.⁷ As colleges of pharmacy seek to increase student success, enhance professional development, and meet the co-curricular elements of the Accreditation Council for Pharmacy Education (ACPE) Standards 2016,⁸ strengthened partnerships with state associations may be mutually beneficial in achieving both the goals of the colleges and the state associations.

Factors associated with state pharmacy association membership decisions by the current generation of pharmacy graduates have not been defined. In 2002, a state pharmacy association study reported high perceived member value for continuing education programs, legislative updates, and leadership training provided by their organizations.⁹ This research may not accurately characterize contemporary factors driving membership decisions among new practitioners today. Continued progress and viability as a strong professional society requires understanding the membership, particularly the values of new practitioners. The purpose of this project was to examine factors reported by recent pharmacy graduates that affect their decisions to join state professional pharmacy associations.

Methods

A cross sectional study was designed to examine factors affecting membership decisions of recent pharmacy graduates from two colleges of pharmacy in Kentucky. Investigators from the Kentucky Society of Health-System Pharmacists (KSHP), the Kentucky Pharmacists Association (KPhA), the University of Kentucky College of Pharmacy (UKCOP), and the Sullivan University College of Pharmacy (SUCOP) collaborated in this project to form The Joint Membership Research Project Task Force (herein referred to as the Task Force). The study was approved by the University of Kentucky Institutional Review Board.

Questionnaire development

The 18-member Task Force used an iterative process to develop a 16-item survey instrument based on areas of interest to the state pharmacy associations and included several items adapted from the American Society of Health-System Pharmacists (ASHP) Membership Survey Template for State Affiliates.¹⁰ The survey questionnaire was pretested by final-year pharmacy students for readability, functionality, and face validity. The survey was divided into three parts: 1) information on post-graduate training, current practice settings, involvement in pharmacy organizations as a pharmacy student, and current state and national association membership; 2) factors influencing graduates' decision to join a state pharmacy association; and 3) perceptions of early post-graduation membership rates and value of potential membership incentives. Responses were not required for individual survey items. Branching logic was employed to suppress irrelevant questions based on response to prior questions.

Study population

Alumni graduating from the two colleges of pharmacy between 2011 and 2014 were invited via e-mail to complete the online survey instrument. A total of 544 alumni were identified (334 and 210 from UKCOP and SUCOP, respectively) from the colleges' alumni databases. The survey invitation informed participants of the study objective to assess factors influencing graduates' decision to join state professional pharmacy associations. There were no exclusions for participation other than lack of current e-mail address. The survey invitation was emailed in October 2015, followed by periodic reminder emails and closure of the survey in January 2016. Survey results were submitted confidentially through REDCap (Version 6.16.1, Vanderbilt University, Nashville, TN).

Statistical analysis

Responses were collected and analyzed in aggregate. All submitted surveys were included in the analysis. Denominators for individual survey items were adjusted when missing responses occurred. Categorical data were reported as percentages. Chi-square statistics and Fisher's exact tests (IBM SPSS Statistics, Version 24, IBM Corp, Armonk, NY) were used to examine relationships between post-graduate training, student pharmacist professional organization engagement, and state association membership rates. Significance was set at 0.05.

Results

Of the 544 alumni invited to participate, 102 (18.8%) responded to the survey. Five individuals declined to participate, leaving 97

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