



Short communication

Preparing pharmacy graduates for interviews: A collaborative statewide mock interview session to improve confidence

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Abstract

Objective: Present a statewide collaborative mock interview session for students and assess the impact in building confidence.
Methods: Students participating in a mock interview session were surveyed to assess for changes in their interview-facing confidence.

Results: In all, 33 of 54 mock interview participants responded to the survey. Of the 33 students, 17 students (51.5%) strongly agreed or agreed that they felt confident in their ability to face interview prior to their mock interview sessions compared with 33 of 33 (100%) after their sessions.

Conclusions: All students who participated in the survey found the mock interview sessions and CV review beneficial. Arming graduates with an array of professional and technical skills is important, and acquiring strong interview skills can increase their self-confidence. Collaboration between state organizations and other colleges of pharmacy can create powerful opportunities to unite student pharmacists with interviewers.

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Introduction

As student pharmacists progress toward graduation, they are faced with the decision of where to begin their careers as licensed health care professionals. Fortunately for the profession, there are several avenues of practice for graduates depending on their interests. Increasingly, graduates consider additional training to strengthen and hone their skill set before entering the workforce. Regardless of

the chosen path, commitment to an organization needs to be a well-thought-out decision that requires consideration of both the applicant and the employer. The interview serves as an integral component in the decision, enabling assessment of the applicant's "soft" skills, or the skills that cannot be assessed from a written document such as the curriculum vitae (CV) or résumé. Likeability, effective communication, passion, and motivation are some of the attributes that make a standout candidate.¹

The number of pharmacy schools and graduates has continued to rise, with 6948 conferred Doctor of Pharmacy (PharmD) graduates in 2001 to a projected graduation of 14,277 in 2016.² It has been suggested that the number of graduates may soon exceed the workforce needed, leading to an excess of trained pharmacy professionals and

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increased competition for employment.² This anticipated surplus and a shift in the level of practice have led new graduates to recognize that postgraduate residency training is a pre-requisite for certain jobs, and have emerged as primary motivating factors to pursue such training.³ While the number of available residency positions has steadily grown, the supply and demand curve is still tilted with the candidates in steep competition for a limited number of positions. In 2007 there were 288 candidates without positions, growing to over 1100 in 2011.⁴ In 2014, there were 4142 students who participated in the American Society of Health-System Pharmacists (ASHP) residency-matching program for a postgraduate year one (PGY-1) pharmacy residency. Of the participating applicants, 1502 (36%) were not matched to a position.⁵ Given the increasing number of graduates and the tightening job and postgraduate training market, students are recognizing the importance of preparation for interviews as a factor in successful placement. The interview process is considered by many to be a critical factor, and it is here that the candidate can truly showcase his/her personality, critical thinking skills, and passion for the profession, as well as establish his/her “fit” within the organization.^{1,6} As such, it is in the student’s best interest to arrive to the interview well prepared. This preparation can be achieved through practice interviews with friends, colleagues, preceptors, or mentors.

In light of the growing competition for pharmacist positions, many colleges of pharmacy have begun incorporating interview preparation into their curriculum or as part of elective courses, with mock interviewing being a common method of preparation.^{7–9} The importance of interview preparation has also been recognized on a national level. For example, the American College of Clinical Pharmacy (ACCP) Education and Training Practice and Research Network has organized mock interview sessions for student practitioners during some of its annual meetings.¹⁰

In Arizona, a strong relationship exists between the state pharmacy association, Arizona Pharmacy Association (AzPA), a state affiliate of the American Society of Health-System Pharmacists (ASHP), and the two colleges of pharmacy, Midwestern University College of Pharmacy—Glendale (MWU) and the University of Arizona College of Pharmacy (UA). AzPA, MWU, and UA have benefited from working together where the goals and missions overlap, such as in the education of pharmacy professionals across all levels of practice in the state. This cooperative relationship in the state is long-standing, but has recently become more relevant in light of the 2012–2013 Professional Affairs Committee of the American Association of Colleges of Pharmacy (AACCP), which was charged with “Identifying successful practices in the development and maintenance of effective relationships between state pharmacy organizations and colleges/schools or pharmacy.”¹¹ The collaborative efforts between the state pharmacy association and the local colleges of pharmacy are an example of such an effective relationship.

In recognition of the need to optimally prepare local graduates for their approaching entrance into the profession, AzPA has created “student track” programming at its annual conventions to meet the needs and interests of their colleagues-in-training. At the 2013 (June 27–30) AzPA annual convention, the student track included student-led podium presentations, round table discussions with seasoned pharmacists in practice (e.g., ambulatory care, health-system, academia, managed care, and pharmacy law), and a mock interview and CV review session. The intent of the mock interview session was to expose students to the interview process, give them confidence in interviewing, and give them constructive feedback on their interview technique as well as CV structure and content.¹²

While the benefit of mock interviewing has been studied, the data published are limited.^{7,8} Therefore, the objectives of this study were to quantify the perceived benefit of the mock interview and CV review session and the increase in student confidence. A survey was designed for the students to be completed after their mock interview sessions that assessed the students’ confidence in interviewing both before and after the session, as well as their opinions on various components of the session. This study also serves to showcase a successful collaborative effort between local schools of pharmacy and a state pharmacy association.

Methods

The mock interview session took place at the 2013 AzPA annual convention and was organized by AzPA and the faculty and students of both colleges of pharmacy (MWU and UA). In all, 41 pharmacist members of AzPA were invited to serve as mock interviewers. The interviewers were practicing pharmacists holding positions in several areas of pharmacy, including community, hospital, managed care, and academia. A number of the interviewers were pharmacy supervisors, Directors of Pharmacy, or residency program directors (Table 1).

Information regarding the mock interview session was made available via promotional flyers for the event. Students were able to pre-register for this session while

Table 1
Interviewer practice settings^a (N = 41)

Academia	9
Clinical pharmacy ambulatory/outpatient	6
Clinical pharmacy inpatient/acute care	12
Community pharmacy	3
Managed care (mail order included)	4
Pharmacy directors/residency program directors/management and administration	8
Other	2

Note: Number of participants appears greater than 41 because some interviewers have more than one designation (e.g., academic working in ambulatory care).

^a Self-reported by interviewer upon registration.

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