

Assessing pharmacy workforce issues as the profession arrives at a critical juncture

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Finding your way in times of change

The pharmacist labor market has undergone dynamic transformations affecting its growth, including changes in the economy, expansion of pharmacy education, and the introduction of new patient care and prescription benefit models.¹ The Pharmacy Manpower Project has seen decreases in the demand for pharmacists during the past decade.² Therefore, the job market likely is different compared with when many pharmacists were finding their first job after graduation. This new job market gives pharmacists, both recent graduates and veteran pharmacists, an opportunity to assess their career.



Vos

So, how can you, the pharmacist, find your way in these times of change? As Dr. Seuss tells us, "You have brains in your head. You have feet in your shoes. You can steer yourself any direction you choose."³

Finding your passion

The practice of pharmacy continues to offer a vast array of opportunities allowing pharmacists to practice in a variety of settings. Pharmacists serve patients in many health care settings, including both traditional (e.g., community and institutional practice) and nontraditional settings (e.g. academia, critical care, informatics, administration, industry, various disease- and patient-specific areas of practice). In addition, with the expanded requirements for ex-

periential education in the doctor of pharmacy (PharmD) curriculum, pharmacists today have had more practice-based experiences upon which to draw.⁴

With more practice-based learning experiences come more opportunities for pharmacists and student pharmacists to find their passion. Following one's passion has its challenges, but finding a passion can be even more elusive. What are you good at? What excites you? What do you read about? What do you dream of doing? Pick a passion and go for it.

Fulfilling your passion

Once a passion has been identified, fully engaging in this passion can help one reach his/her ultimate professional goal. Pharmacy organizations and associations of-

fer information and opportunities regarding many different practice areas in pharmacy. APhA's Career Pathway Evaluation Program can offer insight into what career might be a good fit for a student pharmacist or pharmacist looking to make a career transition.⁵ The American Society of Health-System Pharmacists career options and profiles website provides readers with information regarding an extensive list of careers in pharmacy and puts readers in direct contact with role models in the various practice fields.⁶

Remembering that pharmacy is a small world, seek out and network with those who share this passion. Gain knowledge and insight from mentors, colleagues, and role models. Immerse yourself in its terminology and attend networking events and professional association meetings specific to this new-found passion in pharmacy. And finally, consider additional training necessary to pursue this passion such as residency, fellowship, or additional credentials.

The continuing professional development (CPD) model is one way for practitioners to further develop



The **Association Report** column in *JAPhA* reports on activities of APhA's three academies and topics of interest to members of those groups.

The **APhA Academy of Pharmacy Practice and Management (APhA-APPM)** is dedicated to assisting members in enhancing the profession of pharmacy, improving medication use, and advancing patient care. Through the APhA-APPM Special Interest Groups (SIGs), the Academy provides members a mechanism to network and support the profession by addressing emerging issues. To access a listing of APhA-APPM SIGs, visit www.pharmacist.com.

The mission of the **APhA Academy of Pharmaceutical Research and Science (APhA-APRS)** is to stimulate the discovery, dissemination, and application of research to improve patient health. Academy members are a source of authoritative information on key scientific issues and work to advance the pharmaceutical sciences and improve the quality of pharmacy practice. Through the three APhA-APRS sections (Clinical Sciences, Basic Pharmaceutical Sciences, and Economic, Social, and Administrative Sciences), the Academy provides a mechanism for experts in all areas of the pharmaceutical sciences to influence APhA's policymaking process.

The mission of the **APhA Academy of Student Pharmacists (APhA-ASP)** is to be the collective voice of student pharmacists, to provide opportunities for professional growth, to improve patient care, and to envision and advance the future of pharmacy.

The Association Report column is written by Academy and section officers and coordinated by *JAPhA* Managing Editor Joe Sheffer of the APhA staff. Suggestions for future content may be sent to jsheffer@aphanet.org.

their skills. The CPD framework can be used to more fully develop a practitioner with the goal of improving public health outcomes.⁷ Using the continuous cycle of reflection, planning, action, and evaluation, while documenting outcomes throughout the cycle, performance improvements and career advancement can be achieved.

Pharmacists are shifting into new roles more than ever before. Pharmacists are providing services such as medication therapy management (MTM), immunization services, and chronic disease management in collaboration with other providers.⁸ As the roles for pharmacists expand within the health care system, a need exists for an increased capacity of pharmacists in order to fulfill these roles.⁹ Furthermore, although the demand for pharmacists has decreased over time, the aggregate demand index continues to remain above a score of 3—an indication that the demand and supply of pharmacists are in balance.²

Many factors are creating a critical juncture in pharmacy practice (e.g., expanding roles in pharmacy practice, changing job market, advances in health care, varying economy, transformation of pharmacy education). It will remain important for pharmacists to engage in careers for which they are passionate. As Dr. Seuss tells readers of all ages, “Your mountain is waiting. So ... get on your way.”³

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The pharmacist workforce: A research perspective

As a researcher and member of APhA-APRS, I consider the pharmacy workforce to be an essential area of research, and one that requires continued involvement. Workforce research has implications for several stakeholders, including students, educational institutions, and government policy makers. Workforce projections should be of importance to students who might be considering a pharmacy career. For many



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prospective students, the choice of profession carries substantial economic and career satisfaction implications. Workforce data should be considered by schools of pharmacy in their strategic planning endeavors as they relate to enrollment, class size, and degree granting programs. Government policy makers should stay abreast of workforce research findings to ensure that an adequate (but not excessive) supply of health professionals is being met nationwide.

These past 2 decades have seen major fluctuations in the country's pharmacy workforce, from a perceived and widely accepted state of shortage to one of impending surplus in the very near future. Our recent experience has shown us that the supply of pharmacists can be increased to alarming numbers by simply increasing the number of pharmacy schools and the size of classes. According to the aggregate demand index, we seem to be reaching a balance between demand and supply. The days of a guaranteed job for every pharmacy graduate seem to be over. Will this always be the case?

I began writing this column shortly after a 20-minute phone conversation with a retired pharmacist, who was inquiring about my current study of pharmacist work arrangements. He chose to not complete my questionnaire, but he wanted to share his opinions regarding what is wrong with pharmacy practice right now. “There is a glut,” he expressed several times. Pharmacy has changed so much from when he graduated from Columbia University in the 1960s, he asserted. He was quite satisfied with his pharmacy career, but he worried about those currently studying and practicing pharmacy. All have PharmDs and then go to work in community pharmacy, and this work environment is not what it used to be, he added.

This conversation made me think of recent article by Brown,¹ titled A Looming Joblessness Crisis

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