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Research

The use of oral presentations, role-play sessions, and reflective critiques to emphasize the advocate learning outcome in the pharmacy curriculum

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Abstract

Background: Few reports exist that describe incorporation and evaluation of advocacy-related curricula in pharmacy programs. Our objective was to demonstrate the design, delivery, and impact of incorporating structured assessments within the existing curriculum to emphasize the advocate learning outcome.

Materials and methods: Assignments within two courses in the third professional year of the Bachelor of Science in Pharmacy program were assessed. One course incorporated a signature assignment that required students to reflect on patient adherence and then develop a ten-minute presentation to communicate a strategy to address adherence challenges to a national policymaker. The second course emphasized advocacy through patient care role-plays. A standardized rubric was designed to assess advocacy elements across both courses. A pre- and post-intervention student survey was administered to capture student perceptions regarding the importance of advocacy in pharmacy practice.

Results: In total, 23 students were assessed across two courses. Students achieved a median of three on a four-point scale on each of the four element domains assessed in each course. No significant differences were noted for any element between courses ($P > 0.05$). Student perceptions of advocacy in pharmacy practice were positive, and $>50\%$ of students agreed that they would be more likely to participate in advocacy-related activities after completion of the assignments.

Conclusion: Incorporation of advocacy-based assignments and assessments within existing curricula provides an opportunity to address curricular needs of ensuring students develop advocacy knowledge, skills, and attitudes. Results of this study can be applied to pharmacy programs worldwide seeking to address the advocate learning outcome through curricular measures.

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Keywords: Advocacy; Pharmacy education; Learning outcome; Curricular design; Professional skills

Introduction

Advocacy within the profession of pharmacy is defined as an ongoing commitment to advancing the awareness that a pharmacist provides to the health and well-being of

society by actively supporting and communicating that vision concisely and to ultimately have them speak and/or act on the patient's behalf.¹ It is a core competency that is acquired through continual instruction, experience, and personal growth. As identified by the American Association of Colleges of Pharmacy (AACP), it is "absolutely imperative that pharmacists take charge of their profession and demonstrate to the rest of the world their role in improving individuals' and society's health."² Similarly, the

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Association of Faculties of Pharmacy of Canada (AFPC) requires a pharmacy graduate to competently advocate for patients, communities, and the profession.³ As such, many pharmacy schools and colleges are establishing courses and curricula to ensure that student pharmacists develop advocacy knowledge, skills, and attitudes.^{4–8}

In the Middle East, where pharmacy programs are expanding to meet the growth of the region and emerging health epidemics,⁹ the need for the pharmacist to advocate for the profession by taking active roles within patient care and by speaking and/or acting on the patients behalf is essential.¹⁰ However, little direction is available regarding incorporating advocacy-related assignments and assessments into the existing pharmacy curricula.^{1,5,6} Previous reports acknowledge the challenges associated with advocacy-related instruction and assessment. One particular challenge was that advocacy-related instructions are typically associated with policy rather than health-related topics, which may be due to the lack of awareness of the definition of advocacy or lack of specific goals and desired outcomes of instruction.¹ Attempts to provide advocacy-related instruction have been identified in the literature of other health professions.^{11–13} While these reports provide good examples, such activities in the pharmacy curricula have not been reported. Any work identified within the pharmacy curricula was directed specifically at legislative advocacy, which limited the applicability to patient- and population-based advocacy topics.¹⁴ In this article, we describe how the advocate learning outcome in the form of patient- and population-based advocacy is addressed in the pharmacy curricula using communication skills (including written, verbal, and interpersonal), which have been frequently noted as essential for advocacy.^{15,16}

To assist students in developing their interests, skills, and abilities to serve as leaders and advocates throughout their careers, many courses running from the first to the final year of the Bachelor of Science in Pharmacy (BScPharm) program were identified to address the advocate learning outcome. However, the assessments of this outcome in our curriculum were not standardized nor consistently monitored. In light of this finding and recognition of similar gaps identified from the literature,^{5,6,8} signature assignments were devoted to two respective courses addressing advocacy, PHAR 441: Professional Skills VI, and PHAR 485: Pediatrics and Geriatrics, both offered in the spring semester of the third year of the BScPharm program.

The goal of this project was to illustrate how advocacy-based learning assignments and assessments could be incorporated into the third professional year of the BScPharm curriculum to address the proposed curricular needs of ensuring student pharmacists competently develop advocacy knowledge, skills, and attitudes. A secondary goal was to identify a means of assessing the advocate learning outcome within the existing BScPharm program.

Materials and methods

Course descriptions and implementation

Assessing advocacy in PHAR 441

The PHAR 441 Professional Skills VI course focuses on pharmaceutical care, drug information, and application of skills and knowledge to pharmacy practice with an emphasis on commonly encountered over-the-counter (OTC) symptoms. It is a key course involved in preparing students within the program to speak and/or act on the patients' behalf. Much emphasis is placed on developing the communication skills needed to interact with patients, caregivers, and health care professionals. The course is taught using both didactic and interactive role-play sessions, an ideal setting that allows students to empower their advocate skills. In PHAR 441, a topic is introduced in the form of a 20-minute didactic lecture followed by an hour interactive role-play session using simulated patients or health care professionals. For each role-play session, a student volunteer plays the role of the pharmacist while the other students observe and assist with decision making during the student pharmacist and patient simulated role-play. The instructor provides continuous feedback and instruction throughout the student and patient interaction to ensure students understand the impact of their actions on the patient's health. For example, the student must be able to justify his/her recommendations for self-care or referral, in order to ensure he/she are acting in the best interest of the patient at all times. These actions support the definition of advocacy by promoting the role of pharmacists as health care decision makers. The objectives for this course are given in [Table 1](#). In addition to the role-plays, students were required to provide a written reflection on their performance. The course coordinator and instructor evaluated the students across all advocacy-related domains using the standardized rubric for assignment evaluation ([Table 2](#)).

Assessing advocacy in PHAR 485

The PHAR 485 Pediatrics and Geriatrics course focuses on disease states and pharmacotherapeutic considerations specific to pediatric and geriatric patients. The course was specifically chosen for this project due to the specialized needs of the pharmacist to proactively advocate for pediatric and geriatric patients and to promote patient safety through speaking on the patient's behalf.¹⁷ This course is important to further advance the students' awareness that a pharmacist contributes to the health and well-being of society. Two signature assignments were incorporated into PHAR 485. The first assignment involved a reflective critique emphasizing the patients' ability to adhere to commonly prescribed interventions. Students were given 28 M&M[®] candies to be taken four times daily on an empty stomach for seven days. Students were asked to maintain a journal of their progress and write a reflection page describing challenges related to adherence and to suggest policy-related solutions to help overcome identified challenges. This was followed by a second assignment where students worked in groups of four

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