

Short communication

Board of Advisors' influence in a highly ranked
college of pharmacyKerry K. Fierke, EdD^{a,*}, Marilyn K. Speedie, PhD^b, Lowell J. Anderson, DSc^c,
Jason A. Varin, PharmD^c^a Department of Pharmacy Practice and Pharmaceutical Sciences, University of Minnesota College of Pharmacy, Duluth, MN^b Department of Medicinal Chemistry, University of Minnesota College of Pharmacy, Minneapolis, MN^c Department of Pharmaceutical Care & Health Systems, University of Minnesota College of Pharmacy, Minneapolis, MN

Abstract

Objectives: This article shows how a college may build and use a Board of Advisors to stay current in all areas of a profession. The Board can serve an important role in keeping a college faculty abreast of changes in a profession, thus assisting the faculty in better preparing students for their future careers and maintaining the college's leadership responsibilities within a profession.

Methods: At the University of Minnesota College of Pharmacy ("College"), the Board of Advisors generates an annual report of current and future themes known as an environmental scan. The environmental scan is used for forecasting, assessment, and evaluation of current conditions in each market or industry as they relate to the academic and leadership mission of the College.

Results: Environmental scans from 2004 to 2012 (except 2006 owing to data not being available) were qualitatively analyzed; 2013 is also included as a summary only. Across the nine-year period, three themes emerged: education and science, external influencers, and pharmacy practice.

Conclusion: The annual meeting of approximately 30 advisors from a wide range of expertise appears to be an optimal format for a Board of Advisors for a college of pharmacy with a broad mission. It connects the college to the non-academic world and provides invaluable information that informs decision-making as well as proving review of our programs by important stakeholders. It is anticipated that the Board will become increasingly interprofessional, reflecting this important aspect of health reform.

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Introduction

The Accreditation Council for Pharmacy Education (ACPE) requires that universities and colleges incorporate mechanisms of engagement with external stakeholders. ACPE 2007 Standard No. 1 College or School Mission

and Goals, Guideline 1.2 includes a "...commitment to participate with other stakeholders in the development of new and improved practice models."¹ Not only is identification of stakeholders important, according to the ACPE 2007 Standard No. 7 College or School Organization and Governance, Guideline 7.6, it is important to "establish and maintain a system of communication."¹ This can be done between the college and stakeholders; however, it is deemed best to fit the criteria. One way is to incorporate a Board of Advisors, a knowledgeable group that does not have responsibilities or authorities for operations. Since 2003, the University of Minnesota College of Pharmacy ("College")

* Corresponding author: Kerry K. Fierke, EdD, Department of Pharmacy Practice and Pharmaceutical Sciences, University of Minnesota College of Pharmacy, 232 Life Science, 1110 Kirby Drive, Duluth, MN 55812-3003.

E-mail: kkfierke@d.umn.edu

has used its board of Advisors as a sounding board to provide advice on pharmacy education, practice, and research and to understand the environmental changes occurring in various pharmacy sectors.

The Board of Advisors for the College is representative of many areas of the profession and serves as a means for the College to gather information on developments throughout all sectors of pharmacy. The perspectives offered by the Board are adjunctive to the experiences of members of the faculty. It is also an opportunity for the College to share information with the profession through the members of the Board. The College can also call upon individual members of the Board for thoughts and guidance on particular issues at any time between their meetings.

The College optimizes the Board's knowledge via an environmental scan process conducted during the annual meeting. Environmental scans have been instrumental with other nonprofit organizations as an effective use to gather member knowledge.² The most common use of the environmental scan is to set strategic direction for the organization.^{3,4} This process has been practiced by the University for over a decade and shared with national organizations such as the American Association of Colleges of Pharmacy (AACCP).⁵

Materials and methods

Designing the Board of Advisors

The College experienced substantial change in the decade prior to the establishment of the Board of Advisors. These changes included the implementation of a PharmD curriculum, Practice Act changes, planning for the addition of a rural health campus, and growth in faculty numbers due primarily to responses to these changes.

Creation of the Board of Advisors in 2003 resulted from realization that the college was poised for further growth and a desire to use that growth to advance the mission of the College. At that time, the College had only four to five well-funded faculty members (and about \$2 million in research funding) and that it would be beneficial to increase funding for future sustainability via expansion of its research efforts across the disciplines. Additionally, pharmacy practice in Minnesota continued to move toward a clinical focus. The faculty and administration accepted its leadership responsibility to work with the profession to facilitate this movement. Finally, it appeared that the University's capability to provide on-line education, developed in a non-traditional program for BS degree pharmacists to earn a PharmD, could be used to reach audiences with alternate learning needs and, as a result, generate additional revenue for the college. Simultaneously, the faculty was beginning to think about the next version of the PharmD curriculum, which in 2003 was already eight years old.

It became apparent to College administration that it needed to address this combination of concerns and opportunities

with a strong transformative strategic plan that was sensitive and responsive to the changes in pharmacy practice, science, and education. It was felt that connecting with leaders from the wide variety of pharmacy and health care venues could provide key strategic guidance on the many changes confronting the college and the profession. It is important to note that the College was not intending to develop a fundraising board, rather an advisory board. The members are not selected for the likelihood of donation.

The Board members represent a variety of professional demographics: hospital practice and management, managed care, academicians, pharmacy owners, pharmaceutical industry, professional organizations, and professional and science leaders. Each invitation was aimed at individuals in senior positions within their organizations. On average, there are 35 members serving on this Board, of which approximately 27–28 attend the annual meeting. The Dean began the selection process in consultation with the leadership team, which includes members of central council, faculty and staff with roles for development, alumni associates, as well as nationally prominent practitioners. Ultimately, the invitation decisions were the responsibility of the College Dean. Each Board member is asked to serve for three years, and the appointment is renewable. A University of Minnesota alumna volunteer who has been active in national-level pharmacy organizations and also practices pharmacy was selected to help reach out to specific individuals to solicit to be on the Board and serves as the chair at annual meetings. The best evidence of the value of this type of service to the Board members is that 12 of the current 35 Board members have served from the beginning, re-enrolling for three-year terms.

Role of Board of Advisors and members

The primary purpose of the Board is to provide guidance and strategic insights to the College. Board members achieve this purpose via a collection of their individual experiences and insights drawn from the wide variety of backgrounds represented. While the Board members are expected to commit to attending an annual two-day meeting, they are also asked occasionally to contribute in other ways to the development of the College. For example, they might serve as a presenter at leadership sessions for students or serve on other committees.

Environmental scans

As noted above, one of the functions of the Board is for each member to provide the College with his/her perspectives of the current landscape in his/her specific area(s) of pharmacy. Often, along with this perspective on current events, indications of future events or trends are highlighted. Cumulatively, this report of current and future themes is known as an environmental scan.

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