



Research

Knowledge and attitudes regarding geriatric care and training among student pharmacists

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Abstract

Objective: To assess the knowledge and attitudes of Doctor of Pharmacy (PharmD) students regarding geriatric care and training.

Methods: The survey was administered to first, second, and third professional year PharmD students at a four-year public university during the fall semester of 2011. Groups were differentiated based on completion of a geriatrics-focused course, which is offered annually as a two-credit elective for a maximum of 100 health professional students.

Results: A total of 193 student pharmacists completed the survey, which resulted in a response rate of 66.55%. The second and third professional year PharmD students who took the geriatrics-focused course showed significantly higher knowledge of geriatric care (mean = 8.46 and 10.12, respectively) compared to their peers who did not take the course (mean = 7.45, $p = 0.03$; and mean = 8.67, $p = 0.02$, respectively). Second and third professional year students who participated in the geriatrics-focused course were more likely to be interested in additional geriatric care training compared to their peers who had not taken the course ($p = 0.05$ each). First professional year students who did not have the opportunity to take the geriatrics course yet placed high importance on participating in a geriatrics-focused course in the pharmacy curriculum.

Conclusion: Student pharmacists who took a geriatrics-focused course had stronger knowledge of geriatrics and more positive attitudes regarding geriatric care training. Therefore, schools and colleges of pharmacy should consider the positive impact of a geriatrics-focused course on students' geriatric knowledge and their attitudes toward geriatric care training.

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Introduction

The growth of the older adult population (65 years or older) has been well documented and had reached over 35 million people in the year 2000.¹ This number is expected to double by the year 2030.¹ The increase in the number of older adults and their associated healthcare needs will increase the demand of healthcare services, including access

to prescription medications. Due to this increased demand, healthcare providers and students need to be trained and achieve competency in geriatric care, including Doctor of Pharmacy (PharmD) students. Previous research has shown that a student's positive attitude toward geriatric patients care is largely impacted by interaction with healthcare professionals who have interest and passion for serving this population.^{2,3} Training in geriatric care as a student may influence their knowledge and attitudes.

Because of this population shift and resulting healthcare demands, there is a continued need for health professional schools and colleges to assess the knowledge and attitudes

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regarding geriatric care among their students. Assessments of dietetic students and podiatric medical students have shown that knowledge about geriatric care was low to adequate.^{4,5} However, the students' overall knowledge score increased (by 1.8-fold) as they gained more exposure and training in geriatric care.⁶ Attitudes toward geriatric patients have varied among different healthcare professional students and their training levels. For example, some studies conducted in medical students and residents found that they had negative attitudes toward geriatric patients,^{3,7} while other studies found that they had neutral or positive attitudes toward this patient group.^{8–10}

Changes in attitudes are evident when health professional students have increased exposure to geriatric training. Activities such as an aging game,^{11,12} a geriatric teaching program used to train medical students,¹³ and a clerkship experience provided to pharmacy students¹⁴ have shown to improve attitudes of these students toward older adults with a greater willingness to provide assistance to geriatric patients. These programs enlightened students to the challenges that are faced by geriatric patients and increased students' empathy and positive attitudes toward caring for this population.

Provided that such a large portion of the nation's pharmacy healthcare resources are utilized by the geriatric population and the current PharmD students will become the future work force caring for them, it is necessary to gauge the knowledge of student pharmacists to fill the educational gaps they have regarding geriatrics. By gauging students' attitudes toward geriatric care training, faculty and academic administrators can gain an acute understanding of how teachable the students are in the area of geriatric care. Both knowledge and attitudes assessment results may be used to implement needed changes to the geriatric-focused curriculum. A few previous studies examined the attitudes of student pharmacists.^{11,15–18} A study that examined the overall attitudes of students toward the elderly found these students had a favorable attitude toward this population.¹⁶ Some of these studies examined the impact of introductory and advanced clerkship experiences on attitudes toward treating geriatric patients,^{17,18} while one study assessed the impact of a geriatric game¹¹ and another study evaluated the effect of a hybrid classroom component with long-term care team engagement.¹⁵ The changes in attitudes reported by the aforementioned studies included a better understanding of patient experiences, an increased willingness to provide assistance, and learning how to gain a patient's trust and foster open communication with this population. However, the authors did not find any study that assessed a geriatrics-focused course within PharmD curriculum and its impact on students' knowledge of geriatric care and attitudes regarding geriatric care training.

The current study expanded upon the previous studies by examining the geriatric knowledge and attitudes toward geriatric care training of student pharmacists prior to beginning their advanced clerkship experiences and if

participation in a geriatrics-focused course made a difference. The first objective of this study was to assess the knowledge of geriatric-specific care among student pharmacists based on their participation in a geriatrics-focused elective course. The second objective was to assess student pharmacists' attitudes toward geriatric care training based on their participation in a geriatrics-focused elective course.

Methods

Student pharmacists were eligible to participate in this study if they were actively enrolled in a public college of pharmacy and were in their first, second, or third professional year of school. Final professional year student pharmacists were excluded from this study because they were not taking courses in the classroom setting and they would have likely been exposed to geriatric care in their clinical rotations. The survey was distributed to students in the fall semester 2011 during one class period for each professional year, in which the highest number of students were expected to attend. Student pharmacists who were not in attendance during the selected course periods were excluded from the study. The researchers received permission from the course coordinator prior to administering the survey. A disclosure form was included with the survey informing the participants of the anonymity of the survey and that their responses would indicate consent to allow the investigators to use the results.

The survey was developed to determine what student pharmacists understood about geriatric care (knowledge-based) and their attitudes toward geriatric care training (attitude-based). The knowledge-based questions were derived from geriatrics-focused elective course materials and were confirmed to be important information by the course coordinator. These questions tested students' understanding regarding specific geriatric conditions, such as Alzheimer's disease, physiological changes that occur with aging, and important medication considerations for the elderly. Nine multiple-choice questions and five true-or-false questions were developed, with scores marked as either correct or incorrect. Each student received a final knowledge score that indicated the number of questions answered correctly. The reported mean knowledge score was determined by calculating the mean (and standard deviation) of the students' final scores for each professional year class.

The geriatrics-focused elective course entitled "Perspectives in Geriatrics" is a highly interactive learning experience of interprofessional perspectives in aging and geriatric care, which is taught by interprofessional experts. The course coordinator is a PharmD clinician with geriatric certification and a clinical faculty with vast experience in interprofessional geriatric care, who currently works in a Home-Based Primary Care service and university medical center-based geriatric clinic. The course is open to a maximum of 100 students per year, with a range of 50–92

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