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Research

# Survey of pharmacy schools to determine methods of preparation and promotion of postgraduate residency training

Amanda P. Ifeachor, PharmD, MPH, BCPS<sup>a,\*</sup>, Darin C. Ramsey, PharmD, BCPS, BCACP<sup>a,b</sup>, Deanna S. Kania, PharmD, BCPS, BCACP<sup>a,c</sup>, Christina A. White, PharmD, MBA, BCPS<sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Department of Pharmacy, Richard L. Roudebush VA Medical Center, Indianapolis, IN

<sup>b</sup> Department of Pharmacy Practice, Butler University College of Pharmacy and Health Sciences, Indianapolis, IN

<sup>c</sup> Department of Pharmacy Practice, Purdue University College of Pharmacy, Lafayette, IN

## Abstract

**Objective:** To identify the means in which pharmacy schools promote postgraduate residency training and prepare their students to be competitive candidates for such programs.

**Methods:** An electronic survey was e-mailed to administrators of pharmacy schools who were fully accredited by the Accreditation Council for Pharmacy Education (ACPE) as of January 2014. The pre-tested survey included a possible 28 questions and employed skip logic to guide respondents. Formal activities available to students regarding promotion of and preparation for postgraduate residency opportunities as well as the extent to which pharmacy schools assist unmatched students in obtaining pharmacy residency positions was summarized via descriptive statistics of frequencies and averages.

**Results:** Overall, 63 pharmacy schools were represented of all 114 ACPE-accredited pharmacy schools surveyed in January 2014 (55.3% response rate). In all, 36 schools (57.1%) offered an elective course and 26 schools (41.3%) offered 40 curricular tracks whose purposes were to prepare students to be competitive candidates for postgraduate residency training or advanced direct patient care roles (beyond what is required of all students). The three most commonly used methods to promote and prepare students for postgraduate residency training were lectures, residency showcases, and programming via student organizations. More than 75% of schools offered at least some type of advising on and after residency Match Day.

**Conclusion:** A variety of methods to promote and prepare students for residency training was reported. General academic advising and advising for unmatched residency candidates was found to not be standardized. Pharmacy schools need to develop systematic methods for preparing students.

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**Keywords:** Pharmacy; Residency; Education; Preparation; Match Day

## Introduction

Many national pharmacy organizations including the American Society of Health-System Pharmacists (ASHP),

American Association of Colleges of Pharmacy (AACP), American Pharmacists Association (APhA), Academy of Managed Care Pharmacy (AMCP), and American College of Clinical Pharmacy (ACCP) support pharmacy residency training.<sup>1–3</sup> ACCP has recommended that residency training serve as a prerequisite for all pharmacy graduates who will provide direct patient care.<sup>3</sup> However, the demand for pharmacy residencies continues to exceed the supply of available positions.<sup>4</sup> Of the 4358 students who participated in the Match during the 2014–2015 academic year, only

\* Corresponding author: Amanda P. Ifeachor, PharmD, MPH, BCPS, Richard L. Roudebush VA Medical Center, 1481 West 10th St (119), Indianapolis, IN 46202.

E-mail: [amanda.ifeachor@va.gov](mailto:amanda.ifeachor@va.gov)

2811 (64.5%) matched to a post-graduate year 1 (PGY1) residency program.<sup>5</sup>

The disparity between the number of residency applicants and the number of positions is a reality that affects all pharmacy schools. Various methods by pharmacy schools to promote and prepare students to be competitive candidates for residency training have been reported. This is consistent with the new accreditation standards for the Doctor of Pharmacy degree by ACPE, that state that pharmacy schools should provide information on postgraduate education and training opportunities, including residency training.<sup>6</sup> Semester-long elective courses and multi-semester curricular tracks have been summarized.<sup>7,8</sup> Other type of methods for preparation have also been reported, including brief lectures, one hour convocations, and lectures as part of core pharmacotherapy courses.<sup>9–11</sup>

Even though some pharmacy schools educate their students on postgraduate residency options throughout the curriculum, a need to facilitate readiness for the ASHP Midyear Clinical Meeting and for the residency application process exists as navigating through this process can be overwhelming. Informational packets, booths at career fairs, and dinner programs have been described.<sup>12</sup> Focus on residency interview preparation, from timed interview simulations to student presentations, has also been reported.<sup>13</sup> At least one school has utilized a formal program in which onsite faculty liaisons are made available to help students navigate the ASHP Midyear Clinical Meeting.<sup>14</sup> Practical activities such as curriculum vitae critiques, mock residency interviews, writing letters of intent and thank you letters, and interacting with current residents have also been shown to be commonly employed as a means to prepare students to be competitive candidates for postgraduate residency training.<sup>7,13–15</sup> The new ACPE accreditation standards for the Doctor of Pharmacy degree for pharmacy schools continue to emphasize the role of pharmacy schools in providing academic advising and career path counseling.<sup>6</sup> How schools provide guidance to unmatched residency applicants is currently not summarized in the literature.

The primary objective of this study was to identify the means in which pharmacy schools promote postgraduate residency training and prepare their students to be competitive candidates for such programs. This study also summarized reported methods pharmacy schools employ to support unmatched residency applicants on and after Match Day.

## Methods

An electronic survey was created using SurveyMonkey<sup>®</sup>. In January 2014, the survey link was e-mailed to two representatives, the Dean and pharmacy practice chair, from each of the 114 pharmacy schools fully accredited by ACPE.<sup>16,17</sup> In the event of no pharmacy practice chair, the associate dean was used. Two representatives per school were contacted in order to optimize participation with a goal

of having all schools participate. E-mail addresses of Deans were obtained from the list of accredited pharmacy schools located on the ACPE website.<sup>17</sup> E-mail addresses of pharmacy practice chairs were obtained by searching each pharmacy schools' website for contact information. The survey link was open for three weeks. A reminder e-mail was sent to the original recipients at the start of week three to encourage participation.

An overview of the study was provided in the same e-mail as the survey link. This overview served as informed consent and participation in this survey was voluntary. There were a total of 28 questions in the survey. Skip logic was used so that respondents were prompted to answer only questions that were relevant to their school. For several questions, the next question presented was based on how the respondent had answered the previous question. To identify confusing wording or errors in skip logic, this survey was pre-tested by pharmacy faculty from three different universities. This research was approved as an exempt study by the Institutional Review Board at Butler University. Survey contents are available in [Table 1](#).

Multiple survey responses from the same pharmacy school were summarized into one aggregate response per school, yet still maintaining all unique factors reported per school. Study personnel contacted the initial point of contact for pharmacy schools for clarification in three instances in which respondents from the same pharmacy school reported conflicting data (for example, differing range of elective course class size). Responses remained confidential and were presented in aggregate. Descriptive statistics were collected. Frequencies and means were computed using Microsoft Excel (version 2010).

## Results

Among the 114 pharmacy schools that were fully accredited by ACPE in January 2014, representatives from 63 schools completed the survey at the close of the survey window, yielding a 55.3% response rate. Overall, 47 schools (74.6%) offered at least one dual PharmD/Master's, PharmD/professional degree program, or PharmD/certificate program. A dual master's degree in business administration (PharmD/MBA) was most commonly offered (46% of schools). A dual PharmD/PhD in Pharmaceutical Sciences was the most common dual professional degree reported (25.4% of schools). Six schools (9.5%) offered at least one certificate program. Types of programs offered included geriatrics/aging, global/public health, acute care, ambulatory care, chemical dependency, entrepreneurship, immunization delivery, maternal child health, medication therapy management, pediatrics, or research. Additional demographic information for survey respondents is available in [Table 2](#).

In all, 36 schools (57.1%) represented in this study offered an elective course. Of the 31 respondents who knew how long the elective course had been in existence at their respective school, 26 (83.9%) reported that their school's

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