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Short Communication

Evaluation of a hybrid ambulatory care elective for first year pharmacy students

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Abstract

Introduction: A hybrid, distance education elective in ambulatory care for first year pharmacy students was created with the intention of encouraging students to enter into this area of specialty and/or increase their interest in post-graduate education. This manuscript describes the course structure, the goals/objectives of the course, and the results of a voluntary survey administered to the students at the end of the semester.

Methods: Ambulatory care topics were discussed and taught with a variety of teaching techniques throughout the semester. The survey analyzed their evaluation of the usefulness of the course, their confidence level regarding the topics taught, the usefulness of each portion of the course, their interest in completing post-graduate training, as well as their interest in working in ambulatory care.

Results: Greater than 70% of the students rated the course as “very useful,” greater than 70% of students stated that they “agree” that their confidence level was increased, greater than 85% of students stated that they “agree” that all portions of the course were useful, and finally more than 50% of the class stated that they were interested in post-graduate training and/or working in the ambulatory care field.

Conclusion: ACPE requires that pharmacy programs offer elective courses during the pharmacy curriculum. Offering this course to first professional year pharmacy students provides a foundation for those interested in an ambulatory care. We encourage other programs to adopt this type of elective.

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Keywords: Hybrid; Distance education; Ambulatory care; First year; Pharmacy students; Elective

Background

The number of ambulatory care pharmacists has increased 18% since 2010, representing a growing need for this type of specialist.¹ Additionally, students at MCPHS University School of Pharmacy—Worcester/Manchester

and, we suspect, others across the country, have expressed increasing interest in online and hybrid (a combination of online and face to face delivery) elective opportunities. We developed a hybrid elective that would meet these demands and encourage interest and expertise in ambulatory care.

Very few studies of ambulatory care electives have been published. Two articles were published on ambulatory care electives for pharmacy students: Cox et al.² and Zigone et al.³ Although both electives enrolled third year students, Cox et al., focused on team-based learning (TBL),² whereas

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Zigone et al. focused on team-based and mixed active learning techniques.³ Other articles discussed electives on specific topics related to ambulatory care such as lifestyle modifications in pharmacotherapy, motivational interviewing, interprofessional diabetes experience for pharmacy and nursing students, and diabetes.^{4–7}

An overarching theme in many of the ambulatory care elective articles was active learning. Commonly referenced in the literature, the manuscript of Blouin et al.⁸ outlined the goal of enhancing the active learning components in pharmacy curricula around the nation. There were three themes to Blouin et al.'s goals: (1) require students to come to class prepared to discuss the reasons behind what they learned during their preparatory work rather than use a passive teaching style; (2) enhance the students' ability to problem solve and think critically; and (3) instill in the students the importance of evidence-based theory.^{3,8} We sought to achieve all of these goals in this elective which are outlined in our course objectives and methods for the course.

Based on our review of the literature, we identified several areas in which studies of ambulatory care-related electives are currently lacking. No studies have examined the effect that an ambulatory care elective offered in the first professional year can have on student confidence in knowledge of the material. Most studies have focused on students in the third professional year, during which the elective will coincide with the majority of pharmacotherapeutics core didactic learning. For this reason, it is difficult to determine the effect that the elective had on student confidence in ambulatory care-related pharmacotherapeutics knowledge. Students in their first professional year may start to explore their interest in post-graduate training opportunities, but no studies to date have examined the effect of an ambulatory care elective on student interest in seeking post-graduate training and specialty in ambulatory care.

In developing our unique elective, we hypothesized that students that took it would report more confidence in their ability to meet the learning objectives of this course, as well as have an increased interest in pursuing a career in ambulatory care and/or post-graduate training.

Materials and methods

Expected outcomes and learning objectives

Course objectives were based on the Center for the Advancement of Pharmacy Education (CAPE) 2013 Educational Outcomes (Fig.).⁹ Because students were in their first professional year of pharmacy school, session learning objectives focused on Bloom's taxonomy of learning at the levels of knowledge, comprehension, and application.¹⁰ Activities in which students had to model the behaviors of both pharmacist and patient incorporated Fink's Taxonomy of Significant Learning in the human dimension and caring areas.¹¹ During an interactive diabetes session, students had the opportunity to learn from a certified diabetes educator

registered nurse, which incorporated interprofessional education at a point early in the curriculum.

Educational environment

Background of the pharmacy program: the students in the course were first year pharmacy students in their third semester overall of the two year and ten-month accelerated program. Since MCPHS University is an accelerated program, the students entering into this program have already completed all prerequisite course requirements. This sets the stage for them to begin taking pharmacy-focused courses during the first year of pharmacy school. While they have had introductory level courses in the first two semesters, our elective focused on the CAPE 2013 Domains Approach to Practice and Care, as well as Personal and Professional Development. The students chose this elective, indicating they may be interested in specializing in ambulatory care. Providing general information about these disease states will better strengthen the students' background in these areas prior to entering into higher level pharmacy courses that cover their area of interest.

This was an introductory level two-credit hour elective that enrolled 30 students in their first professional year of the Doctor of Pharmacy curriculum. A total of 23 students on the main campus and seven students on the satellite campus participated during the tenth-week 2014 summer semester. The elective was team-taught by two faculty members on the main campus and one on the satellite campus. All coordinators were at the rank of Assistant Professor of Pharmacy Practice and had been working in academia for one to four years. Through the Blackboard educational platform, the following four sessions were delivered online using a combination of required readings, YouTube videos, and PowerPoint lectures with embedded audio files: "motivational interviewing," "dyslipidemia," "hypertension," and "diabetes." Using distance education technology, the following six sessions involved hands-on exercises that were delivered face to face (F2F): "introduction to ambulatory care and medication therapy management (MTM)," "motivational interviewing," "hypertension," "diabetes," "asthma/COPD," and "final presentations." Distance education technology involved live-streaming video and audio on both campuses, so that content was delivered in real-time and students on both campuses could ask questions and hear discussion from each other. Most of the online sessions (with the exception of dyslipidemia), were followed by a corresponding F2F session, for which students were expected to come to class prepared to participate in activities that would require them to demonstrate knowledge of the material covered in the previous online session. Additionally, important concepts from some sessions were emphasized repeatedly throughout the course. For example, students were expected to demonstrate effective motivational interviewing during their

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