



Research

Assessment of pharmacy students' attitudes regarding professional development portfolios: Before and after practitioners' roundtable discussion

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Abstract

Schools and colleges of pharmacy were recently called on to evaluate students based on portfolios that document progressive achievement of competencies. Student buy-in is recognized as an important consideration related to implementation, and in order to better communicate the relevance of maintaining a portfolio, a Practitioners' Roundtable Discussion was initiated in one college of pharmacy. To assess students' attitudes towards portfolio-based learning and determine the effect of a Practitioners' Roundtable Discussion on student perceptions of portfolio-based learning, a survey was administered to 146 P1 pharmacy students before and after the discussion. The pre- and post-discussion response rates were 95% and 85%, respectively. Students maintained a neutral attitude towards the impact, value, and practical application of maintaining a Professional Development Portfolio (PDP). Pre- and post-intervention analyses of P1 student results suggest that the intervention of the Practitioners' Roundtable Discussion positively affected student attitudes, but in a limited capacity.

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Introduction

The portfolio is considered useful within the educational arena as a means to collect evidence of learning and encourage reflection. In the Doctor of Pharmacy (PharmD) curriculum, such evidence can include records of events or experiences, articles read, projects carried out, teaching sessions attended, and documentation of patient encounters. In addition, a portfolio may include personal reflections and written reflective accounts of documented events to encourage articulation of what has been learned.¹

In 2006, the Accreditation Council for Pharmacy Education (ACPE) adopted updated Standards and Guidelines

for the Professional Program in Pharmacy Leading to the Doctor of Pharmacy Degree,² that called for schools and colleges of pharmacy to evaluate students based on student portfolios that document progressive achievement of the competencies throughout the curriculum and practice experiences. The setting of this research, a private United States College of Pharmacy and Health Sciences (COPHS), requires each student to maintain a standardized, electronic Professional Development Portfolio (PDP) that contains three types of information: expectations of learning, evidence or reality of learning, and reflections on learning. Professional Development Portfolios include self-assessment as well as faculty and preceptor assessments of the educational outcomes from the beginning to the end of the four-year program. Students are oriented to portfolio requirements in the beginning of the P1 year and receive guidance associated with periodic checkpoints thereafter.

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In a review of portfolios designed to guide schools and colleges of pharmacy,³ Plaza et al. recognize the potential for negative student reactions towards portfolio implementation and suggest student buy-in as an important consideration. Studies in nursing students suggest slightly negative and apathetic attitudes towards portfolios that may stem from the common finding that students were unsure about the structure and purpose of a portfolio.^{4–6} One study assessing the use of a limited “prescribing portfolio” in 154 Manchester, UK, pharmacy students found that less than 50% considered it a useful learning experience. Specifically, the amount of paperwork involved in completing the portfolio was considered excessive and regarded as one of the least attractive parts of the process.⁷ As some learners have great difficulty seeing the relevance of reflective learning, portfolios are often perceived as time wasting or not fitting their needs.¹

According to an ACPE Evaluation Team Report of the COPS Professional Program Leading to the Doctor of Pharmacy (PharmD) Degree, students voiced similar frustrations to the evaluation team, specifically citing a lack of clarity regarding the purpose and usefulness of the PDP. Students appeared to view the requirement as extra work rather than as a repository for required work, and as such, the college was asked to improve communication regarding the purpose and utility of portfolios.⁸ Accordingly, a Practitioners’ Roundtable Discussion was implemented into the 2009–2010 PharmD curriculum.

Objectives

The aim of this project was twofold: to assess COPS student attitudes towards a PDP and to determine the influence of a Practitioners’ Roundtable Discussion on student perceptions.

Methods

Study design

This study employed a pre- and post-test design: a survey instrument (Fig.) assessed the attitudes of P1 pharmacy students towards a PDP prior to and following a Practitioners’ Roundtable Discussion. Surveys were administered immediately before and after classroom instruction time. The Wilcoxon Rank Sum test was performed to determine statistical differences between P1 pre- and post-Practitioner’s Roundtable Discussion responses.

Survey data were compiled, analyzed, and stored in a locked cabinet with the principal investigator. Statistical analyses were performed solely by study investigators using Statistix (9th ed.) software program. The project protocol was reviewed and declared exempt by the Mercer University Office of Compliance Investigational Review Board for Human Subject Research.

Survey instrument

A 16-question survey was created (Fig.) for the purpose of this study with input from pharmacy practice faculty. Because a study of this nature has never been conducted, reliability was not previously evaluated. Based on a 5-point Likert scale, the survey assessed impact on learning, value of the process, and practical application. Survey questions related to the impact on learning determined whether creating a PDP was considered beneficial in the learning process. Survey questions with respect to the value of the process determined the perceived value of developing and maintaining a PDP. Survey questions that relate to the practical application determined the likelihood of future application with regard to professional development. Finally, one free-form question was included to solicit additional commentary regarding the impact, value, and application of a Professional Development Portfolio.

Participants

The P1 class consisted of 146 students: 91 (62.3%) female and 55 (37.7%) male. Minority groups comprised 37.6% of the class. The average age was 25 years, with students ranging from 19 to 45 years. The majority (67.8%) entered with a prior bachelor’s degree, and the average undergraduate grade point average (GPA) was 3.35.

An introduction letter was offered before the survey to outline the purpose of the study and to inform students that survey participation was strictly voluntary and no personal information would be collected. Thus, there was no direct or indirect incentive for students to participate.

Intervention

A Practitioners’ Roundtable Discussion was implemented into the 2009–2010 PharmD curriculum, specifically within the P1 Practice of Pharmacy course (spring semester), part of a series of courses combining lectures, activities, assignments, laboratories, skills development, and assessments to provide reinforcement and application of skills necessary to provide pharmacy care. Attendance is considered a vital and mandatory part of every Practice of Pharmacy course, per course syllabi. Apart from attendance, there was no link between the Practitioners’ Roundtable Discussion and student grades.

Pharmacy practitioners representing community pharmacy, hospital pharmacy, pharmaceutical industry, and managed care pharmacy were invited to field questions. After a brief introduction of the activity by the discussion moderator, each panelist presented a brief career biography followed by a one-hour discussion guided by student questions submitted prior to the discussion regarding the impact, value, and application of a PDP. Student questions were generally geared towards what should/should not go into a portfolio, why a portfolio is important, and the utility of portfolios specifically in the employment process. Though not planned, all speakers indicated maintaining a portfolio in some fashion throughout their respective careers

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