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Development and evaluation of an intermediate-level elective course on medical Spanish for pharmacy students

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ABSTRACT

Background and Purpose: The Spanish-speaking population in the United States is increasing rapidly, and there is a need for additional educational efforts, beyond teaching basic medical Spanish terminology, to increase the number of Spanish-speaking pharmacists able to provide culturally appropriate care to this patient population. This article describes the development and evaluation of an intermediate-level elective course where students integrated pharmacy practice skills with Spanish-language skills and cultural competency.

Educational Activity and Setting: Medical Spanish for Pharmacists was developed as a two-credit elective course for pharmacy students in their third-professional-year who possessed a certain level of Spanish language competence. The course was designed so that students would combine patient care skills such as obtaining a medication list and providing patient education, and pharmacotherapy knowledge previously learned in the curriculum, along with Spanish-language skills, and apply them to simulated Spanish-speaking patients. Elements to promote cultural competency were integrated throughout the course through a variety of methods, including a service learning activity.

Findings: Successful attainment of course goals and objectives were demonstrated through quizzes, assignments, examinations, and an objective structured clinical examination (OSCE). Based on these course assessments, students performed well during both offerings of the course.

Discussion: While the class cohort size was small in the two offerings of the course, the Medical Spanish for Pharmacists elective may still serve as an example for other pharmacy programs as an innovative approach in combining Spanish language, specific pharmacy skills, cultural competency, and service learning.

Background and purpose

As pharmacy practice continues to expand, pharmacists are caring for a wider variety of patients of diverse races, ethnicities, socioeconomic statuses, religions, and health beliefs.¹ This expansion has led to an increasing focus on ensuring that the pharmaceutical care provided is both culturally and linguistically appropriate. Of particular importance is the growing Hispanic patient population. Currently, Hispanics are the largest racial/ethnic minority in the United States.² In 2015, Hispanics made up approximately 17.7% of the U.S. population with nearly 57 million people, which is expected to increase to 132.8 million by July 2050.^{3,4} While Hispanics have great diversity in their country of birth and heritage as well as their cultural behaviors, health outcomes, and language proficiency, a recent report from the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) stated that on average, Hispanics have a lower English proficiency when compared with whites.³ According to the report, 73.7%

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(95% CI 73.5–73.9) of Hispanics speak a language other than English at home, and 32.3% (95% CI 32.1–32.5) speak English less than “very well”. Additionally, this patient population is subject to many health disparities such as an increased death rate from diabetes, chronic liver disease/cirrhosis, and a higher prevalence of obesity.³ The CDC report states therefore, “increasing Spanish-speaking and bilingual health care providers and representation of Hispanics in the health care and public health workforce are focal strategies for improving culturally appropriate and effective health services.”

The health disparities and the lack of health care providers able to effectively communicate with Spanish-speaking patients provides a major challenge and opportunity for the profession of pharmacy, and consequently pharmacy education. The need for additional curricular efforts to increase Spanish-speaking pharmacists is supported in the pharmacy and pharmacy education literature. In a review of quality of health outcomes resulting from pharmacists' communication with Spanish-speaking patients, Dilworth and colleagues concluded that pharmacy education needs to develop curricular strategies to improve pharmacists' ability to provide quality patient care to Spanish-speaking patients.⁵ Another study estimated there is a very low number of community pharmacists and technicians who are capable of communicating in Spanish and concluded that pharmacy schools should offer resources to support Spanish language education.⁶ A different study assessed patient satisfaction with clinical pharmacists' communication skills and determined that additional initiatives, including those focused on developing cultural rapport, should be developed for pharmacists.⁷ The Accreditation Council for Pharmacy Education (ACPE) 2016 Standards also affirm the need for pharmacy education to incorporate cultural sensitivity (Standard 3.5) and communication (Standard 3.6) into pharmacy education.⁸

Schools and colleges of pharmacy have responded to these needs in a variety of ways, including offering courses in medical Spanish terminology or cultural competency while others have incorporated activities, such as service learning opportunities, into courses. There are very few publications of medical Spanish courses specific to pharmacy schools in which the focus is not primarily medical terminology or cultural competency.^{9–15} However, a limited number of pharmacy schools have published information describing their efforts in successfully implementing Spanish language education through various strategies. Wingate University School of Pharmacy uses a pass/fail medical Spanish elective to teach a basic vocabulary through a conversational approach while incorporating cultural awareness.¹⁶ Butler University College of Pharmacy and Health Sciences offers multiple didactic medical Spanish courses where students learn health care vocabulary, advanced Spanish grammar skills, and improve their Spanish communication skills with patients and health care providers.⁹ They also offer a medical Spanish service-learning course, cultural immersion trip, the possibility of completing a Spanish language major or minor, and an elective advanced pharmacy practice experience (APPE) at a Spanish-speaking clinic site. At the University of North Carolina Eshelman School of Pharmacy, a Spanish language module is utilized where students attend a one hour lecture introducing medical Spanish followed by small group activities.¹⁰

While valuable and necessary, courses and experiences that aim to improve Spanish communication skills but focus on basic Spanish terminology may not adequately prepare students to provide two of the pharmacy skills believed to be the most relevant in providing care to Spanish-speaking patients: obtaining a medication list and patient education. Since these skills require effective and safe communication of complicated, detailed information beyond basic medical terminology, it is necessary for educational efforts to develop students' skills in reading, writing, listening, and speaking in Spanish beyond the basic level, all while providing this care in a culturally appropriate manner. Therefore, in order to better equip pharmacy students to provide linguistically and culturally appropriate care to the growing Spanish-speaking population, the Medical Spanish for Pharmacists elective course was developed at Concordia University Wisconsin School of Pharmacy. This intermediate-level course was designed to be offered to students who already possessed a certain level of Spanish language competence. The objective of this article is to describe the development and evaluation of the Medical Spanish for Pharmacists course. The Concordia University Wisconsin Institutional Review Board approved this study.

Educational activity and setting

Course setting

Concordia University Wisconsin School of Pharmacy is part of a private university that has a four year pharmacy program in Mequon, Wisconsin. Elective courses are generally taken in the third professional year of the pharmacy program and students can select from a variety of options including, but not limited to, a critical care seminar, medicinal natural products, and elective IPPEs (Introductory Pharmacy Practice Experiences). At Concordia University Wisconsin School of Pharmacy students are also able to enroll in an undergraduate course entitled Spanish for Professions as another elective course option. This course provides students the opportunity to practice professional terminology relating to a variety of fields such as medical professions, business, and social work. However, like other terminology courses, its purpose is not to integrate knowledge and skills specific to pharmacy practice, and it contains terminology not applicable to traditional areas of pharmacy practice. The Medical Spanish for Pharmacists elective course was developed at Concordia University Wisconsin School of Pharmacy in spring 2014 as a one semester elective course offered to students in their third professional year. The first offering of the Medical Spanish for Pharmacists elective course occurred in fall 2014.

Prerequisites and competency examination

To help ensure students interested in the elective course possessed the necessary baseline level of Spanish knowledge and skills to be successful in the course, suggested course prerequisites included four years of high school Spanish or two semesters of college-level

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