



Short communication

Implementation and effectiveness of a didactic pharmacy leadership elective

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Abstract

Objective: To create, implement, and evaluate the effectiveness of a pharmacy leadership elective to change perceptions of personal leadership abilities for third-year pharmacy students.

Methods: A didactic pharmacy leadership elective course utilizing peer teaching was designed to promote future leaders within the pharmacy profession. A total of six students were enrolled in the first delivery of this elective. The course format was a combination of assigned readings, in-class activities, self-reflections, guest speakers, peer-taught student workshops, APPE student facilitation, and portfolio creation. Evaluation of student perceptions was assessed by pre-course and post-course surveys.

Results: Students reported perceived growth in all aspects of the course surveys, engaged more productively during course encounters, and provided positive feedback regarding guest speakers and peer workshops. Data suggested students felt more comfortable providing the definition of leadership, recognizing their own leadership capabilities, and identifying potential resources for professional growth.

Conclusions: A didactic pharmacy leadership elective course was successfully implemented. Student perception data and feedback indicated that the course was effective in utilizing peer teaching to promote awareness of leadership capabilities and stimulating personal growth.

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Introduction

Pharmacy education organizations have identified the need for leadership development within the Doctor of Pharmacy curriculum. The Center for the Advancement of Pharmaceutical Education (CAPE) outcomes highlights this necessity through Educational Outcome Domain 4, Section 4.2 that provides suggested skills students should develop prior to graduation.¹ The Accreditation Council for Pharmacy Education (ACPE) Standards four and nine stress the

need for colleges or schools of pharmacy to promote a culture of leadership that develops capable and driven graduates, regardless of titles or positions.² Finally, the Argus Commission goes a step further in identifying a framework of student leadership development to ensure the implementation of a “sustainable program of leadership development.”³

Upon graduation, pharmacy practitioners and leaders have noted a growing concern regarding a gap in leadership within the profession. A survey conducted by White⁴ suggested that this gap would become more significant in the upcoming years, as it is anticipated that up to 80% of pharmacy administrators will be leaving their positions within a 10-year period. This potential leadership deficiency extends to other health care professionals as well.^{5,6}

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In response to this potential deficit in leadership in the workplace, Doctor of Pharmacy faculty members from various programs developed 12 guiding principles for student leadership development within the curricula.⁷ A review of the pharmacy literature for the development of such curricular implementation revealed one article describing a faculty taught leadership elective course on two campuses, which utilized didactic education and self-directed application through small group discussions and reflections.⁸ An additional publication was found, which described an elective developed and executed by graduate students, and utilized professional portfolios and reflections for assessment.⁹

Nursing and medical literature have a strong focus on clinical training in post-graduate experiences, and there are limited publications for leadership training within the didactic curriculum.^{10,11} This could be the result of a perception that experiential training is the most effective method for teaching leadership skills.¹² These disciplines have identified the need for leadership development in professional education, but may have trouble integrating this need into curricula due to lack of available time and potential disinterest in some activities.¹³ Common beneficial skills identified for professional education include leadership styles, emotional intelligence, teamwork, communication, conflict resolution, and time management.^{11,12} A systematic review of the nursing leadership literature suggests that educational activities contribute most significantly to leadership practices, as compared to traits, characteristics, and behaviors.¹⁴ This supports the idea that leadership skills are learnable behaviors and can be developed through focused educational activities.^{14,15}

Rationale and objectives

Based on the strong emphasis of leadership by pharmacy organizations and the potential deficit in professional curricula and the workforce, a need was identified for an elective course to support the continuing professional growth of students and the profession as a whole. The specific goals of this pilot study were to create, implement, and evaluate the effectiveness of a pharmacy leadership elective to change perceptions of personal leadership abilities for third-year pharmacy students. The aim of the

course was to have students identify individual leadership styles and develop skills that will enable them to lead change in various health care settings. The course was intentionally designed to address a variety of leadership styles and themes, including transformational, servant, laissez-faire, and transactional leadership. Upon evaluation of previously published courses, opportunities were identified to further leadership development through peer teaching. This strongly enhances the learning of the peer teacher, but provides overall benefits to both the peer teacher and learners.^{14,16} This also allows students to gain valuable experience, confidence, and the opportunity to convey ideas to others.

Methods

Course format

The pharmacy leadership course at the University of South Florida College of Pharmacy was a 2-hour elective that met once weekly for 15 weeks. It was designed to address various teaching outcomes regarding pharmacy leadership based on accrediting organizations and supporting literature.^{1–3,7} All 12 guiding principles defined by Traynor et al.⁷ were incorporated into the development of the elective. A review of the limited number of pharmacy focused leadership textbooks lead to the course adoption of “The Pharmacy Leadership Field Guide: Cases and Advice for Everyday Situations” by DeCoske et al.¹⁷ Specific course objectives are listed in [Table 1](#).

The course format included face-to-face class meetings and activities in addition to assignments completed by the students outside of the classroom. The methods utilized included assigned readings, in-class activities, peer teaching, guest speakers, self-reflections, and portfolio creation. All students completed the StengthsFinder 2.0 inventory self-assessment to identify their top five strengths. An overview of leadership topics and additional assignments are included in [Table 2](#).

Students were required to complete assigned reading from the course textbook prior to each class meeting. During the class period, the course coordinators identified active learning and self-reflection activities in an effort to promote personal awareness and growth. Self-reflective

Table 1
Pharmacy leadership elective course objectives

Upon completion of this course, each student will be able to
Define leadership theories and analyze their effects as it applies to health care.
Cultivate a personal leadership philosophy.
Apply strategies for effective communication, conflict resolution, and negotiation in the workplace.
Combine ethical characteristics into leadership practice and develop the ability to motivate followers.
Utilize leadership skills in professional practice in order to serve as effective health care leaders.
Identify areas in the health care profession in need of leadership.
Articulate challenges and opportunities in today's workplace, and propose how such issues can be addressed in the future.
Identify and evaluate personal leadership style and create a plan for developing oneself as a “healthcare change agent.”

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