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Short Communications

Use of a health screening and education event to change student attitudes toward the elderly[☆]



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ABSTRACT

Background: While many schools have incorporated geriatric pharmacy education into their curricula, questions remain as to how these experiences shape student perceptions of the geriatric population. The objective of this study was to assess student comfort levels and perceptions toward the geriatric patient population before and after participation in a single health screening and education event.

Methods: Student perceptions about the elderly (measured via the Geriatrics Attitude Survey) and comfort levels in caring for geriatric patients were assessed before and after an event.

Results: Twenty-two students completed pre-event and post-event surveys. Students were primarily female (73%), and half were completing their second year of pharmacy school (50%). Global student perceptions of geriatric patients positively changed from baseline following event participation ($p = 0.023$). Results reveal significant increases from baseline in student comfort levels with communicating, screening, and counseling elderly patients ($p < 0.001$, 0.01 , and 0.001 , respectively).

Conclusion: The Geriatrics Attitude Survey is a useful tool in assessing the value of a geriatric experience. Participation in this geriatric experience caused a statistically significant positive change in global perception scores. Additionally, survey results indicate that interactions with geriatric patients at a single event increased student comfort in communication, screening, and counseling.

Introduction

The geriatric population in the United States is continually increasing. Between 2005 and 2050, the elderly population in America is predicted to double, and by 2030, one in four Americans will be over the age of 65.^{1–2} Data published by the Kaiser Foundation suggest that elderly adults use 34% of all prescription medications, and overall prescription use is predicted to rise by 10% each year.³ The Medicare Modernization Act (MMA) of 2003 introduced Medicare Part D prescription drug coverage and medication therapy management (MTM) services for Medicare beneficiaries.⁴ Pharmacists are expected to play an important role in the continued care for America's aging population, who often present with unique pharmacotherapy regimens as well as challenges

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Table 1
Geriatrics attitudes scale (GAS)

Domain	Perception statements
Social value	Old persons do not contribute their fair share toward paying for their health care. In general, old people act too slow for modern society.
Medical care	If I have the choice, I would rather see younger patients than elderly ones. As people grow older, they become less organized and more confused. Taking a medical history from elderly patients is frequently an ordeal. Treatment of chronically ill old patients is hopeless.
Compassion	Most old people are pleasant to be with. Elderly patients tend to be more appreciative of the medical care I provide than younger patients. I tend to pay more attention and have more sympathy toward my elderly patients than my younger patients. It is interesting to listen to old people's accounts of their past experiences.
Resource distribution	The federal government should reallocate money from Medicare to research on AIDS or pediatric diseases. It is society's responsibility to provide care for its elderly persons. Medical care for old people uses up too many human and material resources. Old people in general do not contribute much to society.

^aRating scale: 1 = strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree.

to delivering quality care.

In order to address this growing need for pharmacy care in the geriatric population, it is important to consider the type of geriatric training that student pharmacists should receive. The 2016 Accreditation Council for Pharmacy Education (ACPE) standards offer no specific recommendations for the incorporation of geriatrics into the pharmacy curriculum. Standard 12.4 does, however, state that the pre-Advanced Pharmacy Practice Experience (APPE) curriculum should “provide foundational knowledge and skills that allow for care across the patient’s lifespan.”⁵ Additionally, ACPE Standard 13.2 guides APPEs to “expose students to diverse patient populations,” including diversity in patient age.

Despite several challenges implementing geriatric pharmacy training, such as limited availability of experiential sites, limited room in the curriculum, lack of funding, resistance and competition from faculty with differing interests, and a shortage of geriatric-specialized faculty members, many schools of pharmacy have incorporated some component of geriatric education into their curricula.^{6–10} Implementation of experiential opportunities necessitates the question: do pharmacy student interactions with geriatric patients improve students’ perceptions of the geriatric populations and therefore increase comfort in working with this population? Faculty members at several schools of pharmacy across the nation have attempted to answer this very question.^{8–10}

One tool that has assisted faculty in assessing student experiences with the geriatric population is the Geriatrics Attitude Survey (GAS). The GAS is a validated assessment tool used to measure perceptions about the elderly that was developed by Reuben et al.¹¹ at the University of California Los Angeles. Responders are asked to rate their level of agreement with each statement using a 5-point Likert scale (see Table 1 for GAS assessment domains and perceptions). The survey was initially created for primary care medical residents, fellows, and faculty; however, it has since been used in the literature to assess students from other health profession disciplines, including pharmacy.⁸ Additionally, researchers found that the 14-item instrument demonstrates high reliability, validity, and sensitivity to change.¹¹

Rationale and objectives

A strong focus on delivering care to the underserved has been incorporated into the curriculum as part of the mission and vision of the Butler University College of Pharmacy and Health Sciences (COPHS).¹² Pharmacy students are encouraged to volunteer with various underserved population outreach efforts led by COPHS faculty. Through volunteering, COPHS students are able to gain a variety of experiences that allow them to improve their ability to work with diverse patient populations, such as those in the geriatric population. Focused geriatric content is limited within the curriculum, all occurring during the final didactic sequence. During the spring of the third professional year, a single geriatrics lecture is delivered in both the therapeutic and pharmacokinetics sequences. An optional geriatric course elective is also simultaneously available during this semester. Finally, while a specialty geriatrics-focused APPE is unavailable, the APPE year does offer experiences in long-term care facilities and within the Department of Veterans Affairs. This study aligned with COPHS’s mission by providing pharmacy students the opportunity to participate in a health screening and education event that promoted public health in an underserved geriatric patient population.

The primary objective of this study was to assess student comfort levels and perceptions toward the geriatric population before and after participation in a single health screening and education event.

Methods

The project was approved by the Butler University Institutional Review Board (IRB) in accordance with the research principles outlined in the Declaration of Helsinki.¹³ Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative Program for research in human subjects was

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