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Commentary

Health economics and outcomes research fellowship practices reviewed

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Summary

The guidelines for health economics and outcomes research (HEOR) fellowship training programs devised by the American College of Clinical Pharmacy (ACCP) and the International Society of Pharmacoeconomics and Outcomes Research (ISPOR) suggest that continuous improvements are made to ensure that postgraduate training through didactic and professional experiences prepare fellows for HEOR research careers. The HEOR Fellowship Program at Novartis Pharmaceuticals Corporation was standardized to enhance the fellows' HEOR research understanding and align professional skill sets with the ACCP-ISPOR Fellowship Program Guidelines. Based on feedback from an internal task force comprised of HEOR employees and current and former fellows, the HEOR Fellowship Program was normatively and qualitatively assessed to evaluate the current curricular program. Fellowship program activities were instituted to ensure that the suggested minimum level requirements established by the guidelines were being met. Research opportunities enabling fellows to work hand-in-hand with other fellows and HEOR professionals were emphasized. Curricular enhancements in research methodology and professional training and development, and materials for a structured journal club focusing on specific methodological and HEOR research topics were developed. A seminar series (e.g., creating SMART Goals, StrengthsFinder 2.0) and professional courses (e.g., ISPOR short courses, statistics.com) were included to enhance the fellows' short- and long-term professional experience. Additional program attributes include an online reference library developed to enrich the current research facilities and a Statistical Analysis Software training program. Continuously assessing and updating HEOR fellowship programs keeps programs up-to-date in the latest HEOR concepts and approaches used to evaluate health care, both professionally and educationally.

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The need for health economics professionals

In an era of cost-conscious health care, a vital need exists for experts and professionals who are skilled in the analysis of health economics data and adept at interpreting and using data for health care decision-making.¹ Health economics and outcomes research (HEOR) is utilized by a diverse group of individuals (i.e., pharmacists, physicians, economists, academicians, hospital administrators) from numerous health care settings, each playing an important role in optimizing patient care.² HEOR professionals use evidence about the efficacy and effectiveness of health care interventions to inform medical decision-makers. This is accomplished through the use of various methods including economic modeling and comparative effectiveness research (CER). The purpose of these efforts is to gain a better understanding of the value of these interventions. Reflective of these health care trends and needs, the demand for HEOR fellowship programs and expertise has increased significantly over the past decade.^{1–3}

Industry-sponsored HEOR fellowship programs

Growing from a program initiated at Glaxo Wellcome, Inc. in 1989, HEOR fellowship programs are now found in a diverse range of fields, including pharmaceutical, academia, and managed care organizations (MCOs), with pharmaceutical companies as a prominent locale for postgraduate HEOR education and training.^{2–5} HEOR fellowship programs provide training and hands-on experience in a broad-range of health economics, outcomes research, and CER. These programs are structured to allow the fellow to gain proficiency in the field of HEOR, and CER as conducted in academic, MCOs, and hospital, health policy, and pharmaceutical industry settings. Common HEOR programs feature organizational characteristics such as a salaried, two-year program conducted in academic and pharmaceutical site locations and educational program features including professional and research skills taught and experienced in economic analysis and methodologies, research design and methods, software application, data management, project management work, and exposure to HEOR design and analysis.^{1,6,7}

To assist in the refinement and assessment of HEOR fellowship programs, the American College of Clinical Pharmacy (ACCP) developed its first set of guidelines for HEOR fellowship

programs in 1999.² In ensuing years, studies were undertaken to examine the structure, educational objectives, and effectiveness of existing HEOR fellowship programs from the perspective of current and former fellows and preceptors.² Among the findings, studies reported significant variations in preceptor qualifications and the amount of time devoted to HEOR experiential activities and didactic coursework.^{1,2} One study reported results from a Web-based survey of fellows who had completed an HEOR fellowship between 1999 and 2001. Researchers reported on the overall limitations found in HEOR fellowship programs throughout the United States,¹ and their findings support the need for refinement of these programs to include specific curricular suggestions ensuring program effectiveness (i.e., didactic coursework, outcome assessment).^{1,2}

ACCP-ISPOR recommended HEOR fellowship guidelines

In 2008, ACCP collaborated with the International Society for Pharmacoeconomics and Outcomes Research (ISPOR) to revise and refine its guidelines for HEOR fellowship programs.² Recommendations from ACCP and ISPOR members, as well as a review of the existing ACCP guidelines for clinical research training programs, formed the basis for the revised guidelines. Overarching areas of the ACCP Guidelines delineated in the 2008 published guidelines were related to the requirements of any HEOR fellowship program and what the fellow should be experiencing professionally during a fellowship.

Per the ACCP-ISPOR recommendations, HEOR fellowship programs should generally include a minimum of 3000 hours of training ($\geq 80\%$ of fellow's time) devoted to HEOR research-related activities over at least 2 years, a training plan with goals and objectives developed and documented prior to initiation of fellowship, formal instruction in HEOR-related topics, assignment to a team of preceptors and/or a primary advisor, exposure to ample resources for conducting research, and a standardized plan for the evaluation of fellows, preceptors, and programs upon fellowship program completion.²

Fellows should participate in at least one, but preferably multiple scholarly projects (e.g., literature reviews, dossier development, prospective and retrospective studies, economic modeling). Through a combination of didactic and structured supervised experiences, fellows should also

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