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## Short Communication

## Impact of student to student peer mentoring program in first year of pharmacy program

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## ABSTRACT

**Background and purpose:** Mentoring programs, a practical tool commonly used by universities, can serve to help new students adapt to challenging college life. Peer mentorship offers the potential for professional development of student pharmacists.

**Educational activity and setting:** The Raabe College of Pharmacy at Ohio Northern University implemented a peer mentoring program in 2014. This study evaluates the impact of that program on new student pharmacists. A post-program survey was completed evaluating students' career perception, emotional stability, academic success, and student perception of the program's influence on these areas.

**Findings:** The results indicated that 71.7% of respondents found the mentoring program helpful in their transition to college, and that 60.4% of respondents would "somewhat likely" or "extremely likely" stay active in the mentoring program.

**Discussion:** Peer mentorship may serve as a tool to assist student acclimation to the expectations of a professional degree program.

**Summary:** It was concluded that the pharmacy mentorship program at the Raabe College of Pharmacy at Ohio Northern is making a positive impact on first-year students by engaging them in the pharmacy program and aiding their transition from high school to college.

## Background and purpose

Pharmacy education can be an academically challenging experience for students; a personal support network can help students adjust to these academic rigors. One tool that may help with adjustment to academic challenges is a student peer mentorship program. While the term "student peer mentorship" could have multiple definitions, we use the term to represent a personal collaboration between students from different levels of a program for the purpose of offering guidance, mentorship, and support. Our definition differs from academic-only support programs, such as tutoring, teaching assistant work, or study partner programs. Student peer mentorship programs can establish deeper connections within the student body, help students adapt to the academic environment, and facilitate a student's transition into college.<sup>1,2</sup> Colling et al.<sup>3</sup> evaluated 109 students from two universities involved in a peer mentorship program with a focus on student well-being, integration, and retention. The results showed the mentorship program benefitted student retention and non peer-mentored students were four times more likely to consider leaving college than

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mentored students.

Specific to schools and colleges of pharmacy, additional attention is paid to developing students beyond the didactic knowledge areas. A peer mentorship experience may also aid in achieving personal and professional development goals highlighted in Domain 4 as outlined in the Center for the Advancement of Pharmacy Education (CAPE) 2013 Educational Outcomes, part of the American Association of Colleges of Pharmacy (AACP) focusing on core areas for the advancement of pharmacy education.<sup>4</sup> Domain 4 specifically outlines measures for personal and professional development for pharmacy programs to produce future pharmacists, and it appears intuitive that personal mentorship may aid in development of these skills. Personal and professional development is critical in training competent, well-rounded leaders and pharmacists who can advance patient care and lead the profession to success.

While many techniques, such as academic advising and tutoring, are common in colleges of pharmacy, formally organized peer mentorship programs do not appear to be routinely implemented. An extensive literature search was conducted using selected keywords for literature published from 1995–June 2017. The electronic search included both medical and educational databases (CINAHL, PubMed, ERIC, Education Research Complete). The search used keywords including: peer-mentoring, peer mentor, mentoring, mentor program and pharmacy, and yielded over 1000 results. Most results focused on faculty mentoring or business mentoring relationships rather than a student-to-student connection. The most common disciplines publishing literature on peer mentorship programs between students are nursing<sup>5,6</sup> and business education.<sup>7</sup> There were only two publications describing peer mentorship programs specifically for pharmacy students.<sup>8,9</sup>

One publication reviewed a peer mentorship program conducted at St. John's University College of Pharmacy and Health Sciences.<sup>8</sup> This peer mentorship program paired undergraduates with upperclassmen peers and included structured encounters focusing on tutoring, orientation, and mentoring throughout the academic year. The authors noted that benefits were seen in the areas of leadership and professional development. Mentees were exposed to different professional organizations, clinical specialties, and various practice settings. Academic development was also observed as mentees expressed an interest in adapting to lifelong learning and noted enhanced self-esteem through group support.

In the second publication, Brown et al<sup>9</sup> described the peer mentorship program at Butler University College of Pharmacy and Health Sciences, and highlighted student satisfaction with the experience. In this program, pre-professional students were matched with more advanced students. Participants were asked to engage in social and academic activities (specific activities not defined), and participation in the program was linked to points in a specific required course (PX 100). The instructors collected information about types of contacts and overall opinions of the program. At the conclusion of the program, the majority of mentees (74%) and mentors (64%) found the program to be a positive experience.

The peer mentorship program at the Raabe College of Pharmacy at Ohio Northern University (direct entry/0–6 program) allows continuing students to match with incoming students to provide guidance, mentorship, and support. The college had noted a small but consistent decrease in first-year retention rates to the pharmacy program during the preceding two-year time frame (decrease from 96% to 93%; representing an increase of student dropout from six to 12 students). It was hoped this peer mentorship program would help students better acclimate to the first year and may serve to aid in maintaining first-year retention to the pharmacy program in the 95% range.

Objectives of this study include: 1) obtaining preliminary data for the mentorship program, 2) identifying some of the academic and personal challenges incoming students face, and 3) assessing whether the mentoring experience was perceived as helpful to students' adaptability and success in the pharmacy program.

### Educational activity and setting

The peer mentorship program allows current pharmacy students to match with incoming first-year students. Fig. 1 depicts a brief overview of the process of matching incoming students with peer mentors.

Current students are offered the opportunity to register for a peer mentoring elective course (max of one credit hour). Any continuing student, regardless of year in program, who is in good academic standing is eligible for participation. No limit is set on the

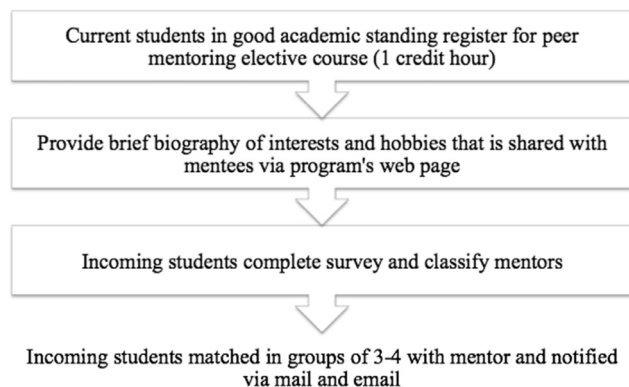


Fig. 1. Flow chart of peer mentorship matching system.

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