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## Currents in Pharmacy Teaching and Learning

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Experiences in Teaching and Learning

## Role and impact of student pharmacists and a pharmacist on an international interprofessional medical brigade

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## ABSTRACT

**Background and purpose:** Colleges of pharmacy will be seeking new opportunities to provide student pharmacists with interprofessional and global experiences. The objectives of this paper are to describe an international experience to expand interprofessional and global pharmacy education and to evaluate the roles and impact of fourth-year pharmacy students and a pharmacist integrated into an interprofessional team on a medical brigade to Guatemala.

**Educational activity and setting:** In August 2014, two fourth-year student pharmacists and one pharmacist/professor joined a group of 26 pre-medical students from Boston College (BC), six medical doctors and a nursing assistant as part of a one-week medical brigade to Quetzaltenango, Guatemala. An electronic survey was administered to all brigade members upon completion of travel. The survey assessed the most useful services provided by the pharmacist and pharmacy students on the brigade and changes in perspective towards the role of pharmacy on an interprofessional healthcare team. The survey also collected information describing satisfaction with communication, efficiency, professionalism and knowledge of the pharmacy staff.

**Findings and discussion:** Pharmacy staff was utilized for knowledge of drug products, therapeutic substitution, counseling and drug dosing/calculations. The brigade directly resulted in an increased likelihood for physicians and students to refer a question to a pharmacist. After this brigade, all non-pharmacy members viewed pharmacists as important members of the medical team and felt better prepared to work as part of a team.

**Summary:** The experience was effective in fostering interprofessional relationships amongst healthcare students and professionals.

## Background and purpose

As a result of the new Accreditation Council for Pharmacy Education (ACPE) Standards 2016, colleges of pharmacy will be seeking new opportunities to provide student pharmacists with interprofessional experiences.<sup>1</sup> In addition to increasing cultural competence and professional development, experiences in global health can provide students with unique opportunities to work with students and practitioners from other professions.<sup>2,3</sup> According to the Consortium of Universities for Global Health (CUGH), global health places priority on improving health, achieving equality in health and promoting interdisciplinary collaboration. A good international learning experience should therefore bring together students of many disciplines and professions, in- and outside of healthcare.<sup>4,5</sup> The American Association of Colleges of Pharmacy (AACCP) has recognized the need to expand opportunities for student pharmacists in global healthcare and also support and share work that is already being done.<sup>6</sup> As a result, expansion of global

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education opportunities is a high priority for colleges and schools of pharmacy.<sup>7</sup>

This paper describes a specific international experience for student pharmacists which has not been previously discussed in the literature. It fills a need identified by AACP and adds to the current body of literature on the global opportunities in pharmacy education by describing a safe and regularly recurring international experience. This opportunity specifically addresses the 2013 Center for the Advancement of Pharmacy Education (CAPE) Educational Outcomes 2.4, 3.4, 3.5, and 3.6 (population-based care, interprofessional collaboration, cultural sensitivity, and communication, respectively).<sup>8</sup> As the relationship and experience grows, it could be expanded to satisfy many more of these outcomes. There is more literature describing the effects of international experiences in medical students, but less so in student pharmacists.<sup>9,10</sup> The goal of the survey administered to brigade members was to investigate the impact that international experiences can have on interprofessional education and advocacy for the pharmacy profession.

### Educational activity and setting

Timmy Global Health (TGH) is a non-profit organization that “expands international access to healthcare and empowers both students and volunteers to confront challenging global health issues”.<sup>11</sup> Several opportunities including order verification, patient counseling, clinical education, and drug information services exist for student pharmacists and pharmacists on interprofessional medical brigades in Guatemala, Ecuador, the Dominican Republic, and Nigeria. However, prior to 2013, members from the profession of pharmacy had not joined these particular missions. In 2012, a University of Rhode Island (URI) College of Pharmacy (COP) faculty member received an e-mail communication from the Boston College (BC) chapter of TGH about their upcoming trip to Guatemala and attended for the first time in August of 2013. Once logistics, legitimacy and safety were verified by that trip, plans were made to send another faculty member with student pharmacists the following year. Utilizing an application process open to all fourth-year student pharmacists, two students were selected from the URI COP. The application required a submission of the student's curriculum vitae along with an essay describing any current or previous volunteer experience and why he/she wanted to attend the trip.

In August of 2014, a pharmacist (faculty member) and two student pharmacists joined the brigade made up of volunteer pre-medical BC students, physicians and nurses in addition to local physicians and staff. The pharmacist and student pharmacists were individually responsible for paying for their trip in addition to traveling with one luggage of donated medications and medical supplies (attained by TGH). The pharmacist and student pharmacists were actively involved in several parts the clinic. Duties included, but were not limited to, organization of donated medications, running the clinic pharmacy (medication counting, bagging, and labeling), verifying prescriptions, providing drug information to interprofessional team members, and counseling patients and their families.

During the brigade week, there were several opportunities for student volunteers to contribute throughout the clinic. Volunteers assisted with triage (vital signs and patient history), pharmacy services, fluoride treatments, public health education, and physician shadowing. After a triage station where vital signs and patient history were taken, patients were seen by a physician who was accompanied by a student pharmacist or pre-medical student to assist with documentation. Patients were then sent to the area of the clinic designated as the pharmacy where they awaited their prescriptions. Physicians entered visit details and prescriptions into an electronic medical record via a secure local network made available to the clinic by the brigade. The pharmacist and student pharmacists verified prescriptions for appropriateness prior to filling. If an intervention needed to be made (e.g., inappropriate indication, dose, therapeutic substitution), the pharmacist and/or student pharmacists contacted the physician for changes. Once the prescription was verified for appropriateness, it was filled by pre-medical students working in the traditional pharmacy technician role. The final check was conducted by the student pharmacist under the supervision of the pharmacist. The final product included a label with instructions written in Spanish. To ensure patient understanding, a native translator was also available to assist with counseling as many patients spoke in various dialects. In addition to pharmacy operations, the pharmacist and student pharmacists as well as pre-medical students were responsible for set up and breakdown of the pharmacy each day.

### Evaluation

We completed a retrospective analysis of a single interprofessional medical brigade in Guatemala during August of 2014. An electronic survey was administered to all medical brigade members, excluding the pharmacist and student pharmacists, upon completion of travel. Medical brigade members included: BC pre-medical students (including 2014 graduates), college students (including non-healthcare majors [i.e. international-studies students]), medical doctors, and TGH employees and volunteers. Survey questions collected information on the most useful service provided by the pharmacist and student pharmacists on the brigade, changes in perspective towards the role of pharmacy on an interprofessional healthcare team and satisfaction with communication, efficiency, professionalism, and knowledge of the pharmacist and student pharmacists. The survey was administered within two weeks of trip completion and was sent electronically via e-mail utilizing SurveyMonkey®. This project was designated as exempt URI Institutional Review Board.

### Findings

The survey was distributed to 36 members and 13 responded, yielding a 36% response rate. Demographic information can be found in [Table 1](#). One-third of respondents had never worked with a pharmacist or student pharmacist before the brigade. All participants viewed the role of a pharmacist more positively after the brigade and 84% strongly agreed that their opinion of pharmacy as a profession was changed in a positive way. Brigade members' ranking of the most useful pharmacy service provided is

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