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Research Note

Specialization within pharmacy education: A survey of curricular track or concentration offerings

Katelyn A. Parsons^{a,*}, Eric C. Nemece II^b, Kaylee M. Maynard^c, Beth Welch^a^a Western New England University, 1215 Wilbraham Road, Springfield, MA 01119, United States^b Sacred Heart University, 5151 Park Avenue, Fairfield, CT 06825, United States^c University of Rochester Medical Center, 601 Elmwood Avenue, Pharmacy Box 638, Rochester, NY 14642, United States

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: The purpose of this national survey was to determine what constitutes a curricular track or concentration within colleges and schools of pharmacy. Additionally, for programs not currently offering curricular tracks or concentrations, this survey sought to identify barriers to implementation.

Methods: A survey instrument was developed and piloted. It was distributed electronically via SurveyMonkey to members of the American Association of Colleges of Pharmacy (AAPC) Curriculum Special Interest Group (SIG) contact list, along with academic affairs contacts for the balance of programs not included on the SIG contact list, as obtained via a targeted website search.

Results: Sixty-five of 134 programs responded to the survey (48.5%). Sixteen programs currently offer 38 curricular tracks or concentrations. On average, tracks or concentrations contained 10.6 didactic credits, with 4.6 elective and six required didactic credits; 0.7 introductory pharmacy practice experience (IPPE) credits; and 5.3 advanced pharmacy practice experience (APPE) credits, with 2.8 elective and 2.5 required APPE credits. Most tracks did not require a summative project ($n = 13$), while some required completion of a project individualized by interest/needs ($n = 7$). Forty-nine programs do not currently offer curricular tracks, most frequently due to logistics of faculty, oversight, or the curriculum structure. Of these programs not currently offering curricular tracks or concentrations, 38.8% are currently considering implementation.

Conclusion: Existing tracks or concentrations are highly variable in their composition. Many colleges and schools of pharmacy are considering implementation of curricular tracks or concentrations; this report provides guidance for appropriate rigor and development considerations.

Introduction

According to the Accreditation Council for Pharmacy Education 2016 Standards, the doctor of pharmacy (PharmD) curriculum is designed to promote the development of a graduate who is able to apply fundamental knowledge to rationally evaluate medication management strategies and perform therapeutic assessments to provide patient-centered care.¹ Traditionally, PharmD curricula include coursework and experiential training needed to prepare students for entry into general practice. Graduates who plan to practice within a specialized area generally pursue post-graduate training to fill the needs gap between the PharmD degree and

* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: katelyn.parsons@wne.edu (K.A. Parsons), nemece@sacredheart.edu (E.C. Nemece), kmaynardm@gmail.com (K.M. Maynard), bwelch1@wne.edu (B. Welch).<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cptl.2017.12.012>

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Table 1
Reported specialty track approaches.

Track	Didactic requirement	Seminar	Project	Summative exam	Experiential	Other
Clinical ⁶	3 credits	Skills development seminar I-III N/A	Clinical skills checklist N/A	N/A	3 elective APPE rotations with direct patient care; 1 extra clinical focused APPE 1 APPE with focus on diabetes care	Required participation in clinical skills competition N/A
Diabetes ²	2 credits	N/A	N/A	Oral and written exam on patient counseling N/A	10 credit hours of diabetes-focused APPE 1 education APPE including teaching responsibilities ≥ 1 geriatric APPE rotation	N/A N/A
Diabetes ² Education ⁵	10 credits 6 credits	N/A N/A	N/A N/A	N/A	Comprehensive geriatrics examination N/A	N/A
Geriatric ³	8 credits	N/A	N/A	N/A	2 APPE Rotations (1 with mental health focus, 1 with direct patient contact) N/A	N/A
Psychiatric ⁷	9 credits	N/A	As included in electives Mentor guided research project	N/A		
Research ⁴	12 credits	2 semesters				

IPPE = Introductory Pharmacy Practice Experience; APPE = Advanced Pharmacy Practice Experience.

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