Assessment of Emphasis on Geriatric Principles in Doctor of Pharmacy Curricula in United States Colleges and Schools of Pharmacy

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Background: By the year 2060, the United States geriatric population is expected to double in size. Due to an increased number of concomitant disease states, more medication usage, and decreased drug clearance, older adults are considered medically complex and require care from professionals trained in geriatric principles. The Association of American Medical Colleges established minimum geriatric competencies that all medical students must meet, but the same has not been done in pharmacy schools.1

Objectives: This survey study sought to evaluate the current state of geriatrics-focused curricula in U.S. schools and colleges of pharmacy.

Methods: A 50-item web-based survey was distributed to Associate Deans of Professional Education or similar faculty with knowledge of the geriatrics curriculum at all U.S. schools and colleges of pharmacy. Information was collected on school demographics; employment of geriatrics faculty; didactic exposure to geriatric principles; presence of geriatric-focused introductory and advanced pharmacy practice experiences, co-curricular experiences, and postgraduate residency training; student interest in geriatrics; and perception of preparedness of the profession to care for seniors.

Results: Forty-three of 148 (29.1%) schools surveyed responded. Thirty-five percent require a course in geriatrics, while 63% offer a geriatrics elective. Forty-four percent indicated that they believe there is insufficient emphasis placed on geriatrics in their curricula. Meanwhile, 77% of respondents reported that students were interested in geriatrics, and 44% reported that this interest has increased over the last five years. Thirty percent of respondents lacked confidence that the pharmacy profession is adequately prepared to care for the aging population.

Conclusion: The U.S. population is aging rapidly. Few pharmacy schools require geriatric-focused courses, although most of those surveyed do include some geriatric principles in their pharmacotherapy or pharmacokinetics courses. Additional emphasis on foundational principles of medication management for older adults in schools of pharmacy is warranted in order to meet societal needs.

References: