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Immeasurable Benefits of Professional Pharmacy Community Service

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Cover Page Footnote

The author would like to acknowledge the Purdue APhA-ASP and PSSHP chapter as well as their advisors Alan Farkas, Kimberly Plake, Yaman Kaakeh, and Steven Scott for helping students build these invaluable service opportunities.

IMMEASURABLE BENEFITS OF PROFESSIONAL PHARMACY COMMUNITY SERVICE

Brittany Oliver, College of Pharmacy

ABSTRACT

Community service provides pharmacy students with invaluable opportunities for professional growth in communication, organization, and practice skills. Furthermore, students develop relationships with practicing pharmacists, which leads to influential mentoring and networking opportunities. While building students' confidence and skills, these endeavors can have significant impact on community members' lives.

INTRODUCTION

Service-learning is part of the experiential pharmacy curriculum, but it is so much more than an academic requirement—community engagement is an essential part of being a pharmacy student. Students learn the requisite knowledge necessary to become a pharmacist, but it is difficult for students to become proficient with key skills unless they practice them. Pharmacy students can serve individuals in the community by applying the skills they learn in the classroom. Hands-on practice in a community setting builds upon students' understanding and augments their confidence in this knowledge. Using their skills in a realistic environment requires students to have command of therapeutic concepts and their application. On the other end of the spectrum, many community members lack adequate access to quality health care and health screening resources, so through their practice, students provide a service to the community. In a synergistic process, community outreach benefits both community members and the pharmacy students caring for them.

Individualized student mentoring is challenging in a large classroom setting. Community service provides a natural environment for faculty mentors to foster relationships, impart knowledge, and provide one-on-one feedback to students. Additionally, student-practitioner relationships provide an opportunity to expand students' professional contacts and encourage networking. When students are involved in the planning and implementation of service events, they often communicate with other professionals at the university, national, or international level.

Community service also offers students opportunity for professional growth. As students take on responsibility for community events, they develop a sense of commitment rooted in empathy and accomplishment. Pharmacy students are required to complete almost 2,000 hours of experience in the form of introductory and advanced rotations, but many students choose to go beyond these curricular requirements and serve the community through their membership in professional organizations.

COLLEGE OF PHARMACY ORGANIZATIONS

Every individual in the College of Pharmacy has ample opportunity to find his or her service niche with over 20 organizations from which to choose. Each organization highlights different aspects of pharmacy practice. For example, some organizations bond students in faith (e.g., Christian Pharmacists Fellowship International), others value brotherhood forged among fraternity members (e.g., Kappa Epsilon, Kappa Psi, Phi Delta

Chi), while others participate in honor societies (e.g., Phi Lambda Sigma, Rho Chi). Some organizations focus on specific practice areas, such as nuclear pharmacy, psychiatry, pediatrics, or industry (e.g., Society of Nuclear Pharmacy, College of Psychiatric and Neurologic Pharmacists, Pediatric Pharmacy Education Done by Students, Pharmaceutical Sciences Club, American Association of Pharmaceutical Scientists, International Society for Pharmaceutical Engineering). American Pharmacists Association—Academy of Student Pharmacists engages pharmacy students with all types of pharmacy-related interests, while the Student National Pharmaceutical Association promotes diversity and emphasizes the cultural dimensions of health care. The Purdue Student Society of Health-System Pharmacists attracts students seeking a career in a hospital setting. Students interested in working in community pharmacy can share learning experiences with others who have similar goals by joining the National Community Pharmacists Association. Those interested in population health, research, and decision-making based on societal trends in health care have an organization called the Purdue Academy of Managed Care Pharmacy.

Although each of these student pharmacy organizations has a different focus, they all have in common the element of “service.” Service not only provides an opportunity to engage in specific types of pharmacy practice, but also gives students a sense of whether they might enjoy working in that niche. Many pharmacy organizations engage in health-related community events, such as health fairs promoting disease prevention, medical screenings, or unwanted medication take-back programs. Organizations often encourage volunteering with vulnerable populations such as children, veterans, the elderly, and the underserved. Students develop meaningful relationships with mentors in a small group setting and gain firsthand experiences. Students also can take part in longitudinal projects, such as weekly visits to a day care to help children read or use computers.

MY EXPERIENCE WITH AMERICAN PHARMACISTS ASSOCIATION—ACADEMY OF STUDENT PHARMACISTS

As a pre-pharmacy student at Purdue, I joined the American Pharmacists Association—Academy of Pharmacists (APhA-ASP). APhA unites all pharmacists with the mission to “improve medication use and advance patient care.” APhA offers a variety of opportunities for pharmacists and future pharmacists

to explore the profession. Initially, I participated in general community service events including helping with homework at the Boys and Girls Club, visiting nursing homes, and reading to children at a local day care. These activities improved my communications skills and taught me to be creative in leading games and designing educational sessions. I walked dogs for the animal shelter, painted barns for the Therapeion Therapeutic Riding Center, crafted Thanksgiving cards for nursing home residents, washed windows, and raked leaves. These activities showed me how mundane chores can be gratifying, especially when performed with a team of pharmacy students. Simple acts, like creating and distributing greeting cards, can have a notable impact on others.

Other activities I engaged in included facilitating bingo at the Indiana Veterans’ Home, judging science projects at the Regional Science and Engineering Fair, and coordinating events for Science Olympiad competitions. Working with teams in a large organization highlighted the importance of cooperation and respect, as well as value, for others’ opinions and insights. Planning formal events from start to finish made me acutely aware of just how many details required considerable contemplation and decision making. I learned the importance of having back-up plans and that sometimes we learn more from the unexpected than we would have from the intended course of action.

PROFESSIONAL PROJECTS (APHA-ASP)

As I became more comfortable with the APhA-ASP group and its activities, I began working with the Professional Projects Committee. Professional projects include blood pressure, glucose, and cholesterol screenings, as well as education about drug misuse and abuse. I saw the positive effects that pharmacists can have on patient health. I was enamored with the concept of professional community service. Numerous times, patients told me “I had no idea” or “No one told me that before.” Oftentimes patients were surprised at the laboratory values from their screening results. Some were empowered to take the next steps to modify behaviors or seek out their health care providers. I volunteered at numerous health fairs, growing more adept at providing quick point-of-care testing. More importantly, I gained confidence to chat with the patient and offer my advice for a healthier lifestyle and encouragement in adhering to treatments. I have no doubt that these experiences will help me provide better care to patients in my future career as a pharmacist.

Experience	Service	Learning
Operation Heart Cardio Day	Heart health education with various vendors, Zumba, cooking demonstrations, medication take-back	Provide advice about healthy lifestyles choices, coordinate various businesses to serve as vendors, advertise to promote attendance (Communication)
Christ United Methodist Church Health Fair	Medication reconciliation, screenings	Recognize potential drug interactions, duplicate therapy, inappropriate dose or medication, educate patients about purpose of their medications and how to properly take medications (Therapeutic understanding)
Lafayette Adult Resource Academy Health Fair	Education, principally with Hispanic patients	Communicate with patients about healthy living, overcoming language barriers with those for whom English is a second language and culture differs (Communication and creativity) Measure blood pressure (Screening proficiency)
Lafayette Jefferson High School Health Fair	Education and screenings, teaming with Spanish department to target Hispanic patients	Educate patients about healthy living, especially those for whom English is a second language and culture differs (Communication and teaching) Perform point-of-care testing (Dexterity and screening proficiency)
Romney Methodist Church Health Fair	Blood pressure, glucose, cholesterol screenings	Perform point-of-care testing (Dexterity and screening proficiency) Counsel patients on the importance of adherence to medications and healthy lifestyle choices (Communication and therapeutic understanding)
St. Lawrence Church Health Fair	Blood pressure, glucose, cholesterol screenings	Perform point-of-care testing (Dexterity and screening proficiency) Counsel patients on the importance of adherence to medications and healthy lifestyle choices (Communication and therapeutic understanding)
Custom Plus	Monthly screenings, health education	Perform point-of-care testing (Dexterity and screening proficiency) Counsel patients on the importance of adherence to medications and healthy lifestyle choices and educate patients on theme of the month, such as blood pressure or healthy eating (Communication) Utilize sources such as the American Diabetes Association to obtain helpful brochures and education materials for patients (Resourcefulness)
Lafayette Urban Ministry	Blood pressure, glucose, cholesterol screenings	Advise and suggest healthy tips and offer positive encouragement for patients unable to maintain stable homes, health insurance, or regular physician visits (Innovativeness)
Tippecanoe County Health Department	Immunizations (children and adults)	Observe clinic nurses administering vaccines (SQ, IM, and intranasal) and then administer vaccines to patients (Immunization administration competency) Recognize appropriate vaccines for given patient age and condition (Immunization knowledge)
Purdue Employee Health Flu Clinics	Distribute Vaccine Information Sheets (VIS), register patients	Learn about VIS (Immunization knowledge) Find answers to patient questions (Resourcefulness) Observe flu clinic logistics (Administrative understanding)
Senior Day at Tippecanoe County Fairgrounds	Blood pressure, glucose, cholesterol screenings	Perform point-of-care testing (Dexterity and screening proficiency) Counsel patients on the importance of adherence to medications and healthy lifestyle choices (Communication and therapeutic understanding)

Table 1. 2014–2015 APHA-ASP professional projects events.

Cancer, Culture, and Community Event	Blood pressure, glucose, cholesterol screenings	Gain understanding of the impact of cancer on patients' lives beyond medical considerations, develop greater compassion for and ability to support patients with cancer and their loved ones (Empathy and encouragement)
State Fair	Blood pressure, glucose, cholesterol screenings, advice about medication adherence, healthy lifestyle habits	Work in non-ideal health care conditions (heat, sun, wind, rain) while still providing quality patient care with positive attitudes (Adaptability) Counsel patients about small changes in a setting that encourages unhealthy diet choices (Creativity)
Legislative Day	Screenings and discussion with legislators about pharmacy policy	Advocate for the pharmacy profession and gain better understanding of governmental process (Political engagement)
Statehouse Employee Wellness Checks	Measure blood pressure, glucose, cholesterol with differential, height, weight, calculate BMI	Accurately measure and clearly document key health measurements facilitating progress through an appointment-based workflow (Vitals assessment and documentation) Cooperate with team to help patients at various stations (Teamwork)
Westminster Health Fair	Blood pressure, glucose, cholesterol screenings	Perform point-of-care testing (Dexterity and screening proficiency) Counsel patients on the importance of adherence to medications and healthy lifestyle choices (Communication and therapeutic understanding)
Red Dress and Tie Event	Blood pressure, glucose, cholesterol screenings, heart health education	Perform point-of-care testing (Dexterity and screening proficiency) Counsel patients on the importance of adherence to medications and healthy lifestyle choices (Communication and therapeutic understanding) Develop presentation and education skills (Teaching)
Great American Smoke-Out	Education about smoking cessation, games to engage people on campus in learning and motivate to quit	Practice motivational interviewing and attracting passers-by to listen to facts about smoking and strategies to quit or encourage friends and family to quit (Persuasiveness and communication)
Indiana Veterans' Home Health Fair	Blood pressure, glucose, cholesterol screenings	Perform point-of-care testing (Dexterity and screening proficiency) Counsel patients on the importance of adherence to medications and healthy lifestyle choices (Communication and therapeutic understanding)
City Hall Employee Health Event	Blood pressure, glucose, cholesterol screenings, immunizations	Perform point-of-care testing (Dexterity and screening proficiency) Counsel patients on the importance of adherence to medications and healthy lifestyle choices (Communication and therapeutic understanding) Facilitate administrative responsibilities associated with vaccinations (Administrative adeptness)
Novel Blood Pressure Education Model Research	Educate about hypertension with tangible pump modeling heart's exertion to pump blood, survey knowledge and motivation before and after to assess education's efficacy	Serve as a role model and guide to high school girls (Mentorship) Practice educating subjects according to predefined script, present poster and network at state and national meetings (Presentation ease) Become familiar with IRB-regulated research practice, evaluate data including statistical analysis (Formal research competency)

Table 1 (continued). 2014–2015 APhA-ASP professional projects events.

Figure 1. Variety of 2014–2015 APhA-ASP professional projects.

GENERATION RX (APHA-ASP)

Through the Generation Rx program, originally initiated at the Ohio State University, Purdue pharmacy students have educated hundreds of local K–12 and Purdue college students about the dangers of drug misuse and abuse. Pharmacy volunteers engage students in a Family Feud-style game to name the most commonly abused medications and provide statistics about the dangers of drug misuse. Many have never heard of “pharm parties,” which occur in many Midwest towns, where youth raid medicine cabinets and bring pills to mix into a big popcorn bowl. They take turns grabbing and swallowing a handful of random medications for a spontaneous “trip.” Education is the most effective means of deterring dangerous drug use.

Many students step into leadership roles once admitted into the professional program to organize health fairs, as well as to create and expand services to new sites. I am proud of my accomplishments and leadership roles with APhA-ASP, but the truth is that my work is not unusual among pharmacy students. Many rise to the challenge of leadership, developing and delivering clinical and educational outreach services on a regular basis. All pharmacy students are welcome to participate in professional development and can drive change in our communities.

CONCLUSION

Ultimately, the goal of community service is to help people, but no one can deny that the volunteers gain as much or more benefit as the recipients of those services. Traditional service-learning courses combine credit-bearing didactic course content with service, but volunteerism in student organizations can offer comparable learning experiences when combined with faculty mentorship. Pharmacy students are uniquely equipped to offer community members health screenings and education on health-related issues by utilizing their clinical knowledge under the supervision of a licensed professional before graduation. Students see the impact of their volunteerism in the community and on those in need, but they may be less cognizant of the immeasurable rewards to themselves over time, including the development of clinical and communication skills, professional networks, enjoyment, and personal fulfillment.

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