Assessing Pediatric Specializations in Pharmacy Education: A Survey of AACP Accredited Schools

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Abstract:

Objective: To assess the availability, structure, and impact of pediatric pharmacy specializations in U.S. PharmD programs by identifying existing programs, exploring barriers to implementation, and evaluating how these specializations influence student education and career outcomes.

Methods: A national survey was distributed to AACP-accredited pharmacy schools via Qualtrics to collect data on the presence of pediatric specializations, program structure, barriers to implementation, and post-graduation outcomes. Schools without pediatric specializations were asked about challenges preventing implementation, while schools with specializations provided details on curricular components, experiential learning opportunities, student research involvement and post-graduation career outcomes. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze responses, and qualitative responses were assessed thematically.

Results: A total of 41 pharmacy schools responded (32% response rate), with only 4 schools (<10%) offering a pediatric specialization. Among schools without specializations, the most commonly reported barriers were a lack of faculty expertise (54%), insufficient institutional support (30%), and low student interest (24%). Schools with pediatric specializations reported requiring 2–7 credit hours of pediatric coursework, with all programs mandating at least one pediatric-focused APPE. Research involvement was a key component in three of the four programs, resulting in numerous poster presentations and some peer-reviewed publications. Post-graduation data showed that 50–80% of graduates from these specialized programs are currently practicing in pediatric pharmacy settings, highlighting a strong correlation between specialization and career trajectory.

Conclusion: Pediatric pharmacy specializations remain uncommon in U.S. PharmD programs, largely due to faculty and institutional barriers. However, structured pediatric training appears to influence career outcomes, with a significant proportion of graduates practicing in pediatric settings. Expanding pediatric education through faculty development, stronger experiential learning opportunities, and integration of pediatric content into existing specializations may help better prepare future pharmacists to meet the unique medication needs of pediatric patients.