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## Much More Than Just An Interview

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## VIEWPOINTS

### Much More Than Just an Interview

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All of us have experienced the face-to-face interview process at some point in our lives. Each year, pharmacy graduates take part in this endeavor as they seek practice positions, residencies, and fellowships. However, today's graduates will find a different job market than in past years. Interview skills are more critical than ever for pharmacy graduates interviewing with prospective employers. The standard pharmacy curriculum does not include "interview skills" but the question remains: what responsibility do pharmacy programs have to teach future graduates successful interview skills that can be used throughout their professional career?

There are over 270,000 pharmacists in the United States and projections are for over 315,000 pharmacists by 2018.<sup>1</sup> While this number continues to increase, there are trends pointing to a tighter job market. The Pharmacy Manpower Project's 2009 National Pharmacist Workforce Survey states that roughly a third of hospitals and chain settings restructured schedules and some settings reduced hours in reaction to the economy.<sup>2</sup> Graduates seeking residencies and fellowships have also faced daunting numbers and increased competition for available positions. Approximately 3,200 pharmacy students participated in the 2011 ASHP Resident Matching Program and over 1,200 students were not matched, leaving them to pick from the 146 unmatched positions.<sup>3</sup> This trend has been leading to an increased applicant to position ratio with no signs of the trend decreasing as related to available residencies.

During a student's matriculation through the pharmacy curriculum, little time if any is devoted to developing and enhancing the interview skills needed in today's business environment. Student organizations are often relied upon to provide workshops or handouts to prepare students for this transition, but rarely do these endeavors include the entire student class. Future pharmacy graduates need to be the most prepared for any position they acquire in this ever-changing workforce. We as faculty members and administrators are doing a disservice to students if we prepare them strictly to be excellent practitioners and do not educate them on how to obtain their ideal pharmacy position or postgraduate opportunities through enhanced interviewing skills.

Many alternatives exist to incorporate training in successful interviewing techniques depending on the size of the class. With class sizes of less than 50 students, faculty members may be able to conduct mock interviews with each student throughout a semester. And for larger classes, organizing a career day in which students are required to engage in interviews with vendors can be a beneficial rehearsal for the actual interview process. But before these actions are taken, students must be given the proper knowledge and tools to feel confident during an interview. Faculty members could distribute articles about how to prepare for an interview or how to seek a job in the pharmacy workforce. Many prominent pharmacy journals are seeing an increase in articles on these subjects due to the shifting work climate. The most useful mechanism to guide students is to provide a practicum on proper interview skills.

A successful interview practicum may also include information on creating a curriculum vitae and cover letter but the interview process should be the main focus. This is where experience and knowledge from faculty members can be beneficial. Faculty members can talk with students about what needs to transpire before the interview, such as preparing for the interview, behavioral interviews, what occurs during the interview, materials to bring to the interview, and logistics to consider. Because communication skills are the number one characteristic displayed at an interview, simply answering questions will not separate recent graduates from others. The interviewee must remain engaged and be as specific as possible when answering questions, particularly with the increased emphasis on behavioral interviews in today's job environment. A list of appropriate questions an interviewer may ask, along with questions to ask them, is an excellent tool to distribute for students to use either for job interviews or postgraduate training interviews. Finally, a brief discussion should focus on post-interview etiquette and the appropriate time to ask follow-up questions.

The preparation of future pharmacy graduates for interviews must be adapted to reflect the changing landscape of the profession. More graduates will be seeking residencies and fellowships because of increased opportunities in clinical practice. However, the demand for postgraduate training will be far exceeded by the supply of

pharmacy graduates seeking residencies and fellowships. It is incumbent upon faculty members to not just be advisors to students, but also mentors about what lies after graduation. Only then can we feel a sense of accomplishment after commencement. As a Chinese proverb reminds us “that learning is a treasure that will follow its owner everywhere,” we believe interview skills are an essential element for lifelong learning and success as a pharmacist and healthcare professional. Each of us as faculty members must take an active role in this endeavor if we are truly committed to the success of our students and future pharmacists.

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