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# Rethinking the Core List of Journals for Libraries that Serve Schools and Colleges of Pharmacy.

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# RESEARCH REPORTS

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## Rethinking the Core List of Journals for Libraries that Serve Schools and Colleges of Pharmacy

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The *Core List of Journals for Libraries that Serve Schools and Colleges of Pharmacy* is a guide for developing and maintaining pharmacy-affiliated library collections. A work group was created to update the list and design a process for updating that will streamline future revisions. Work group members searched the National Library of Medicine catalog for an initial list of journals and then applied inclusion criteria to narrow the list. The work group finalized the fifth edition of the list with 225 diverse publications and produced a sustainable set of criteria for journal inclusion, providing a structured, objective process for future updates.

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### INTRODUCTION

The American Association of Colleges of Pharmacy (AACP), founded in 1900, is the national association representing all US accredited colleges and schools of pharmacy education. The organization's mission is "to lead and partner with our members in advancing pharmacy education, research, scholarship, practice and service to improve societal health" [1]. The Library and Information Science (LIS) Section of AACP was established in 1970 as the "Section of Librarians," replacing the Joint Committee on Pharmacy College Librarians, to support librarians and information professionals serving or affiliated with colleges or schools of pharmacy. The section went through several names changes before becoming the LIS Section in 2012, and will be referred to as the LIS Section herein.

Development of a core journal list for a discipline or specialty area within the biomedical sciences dates back several decades to the "Brandon Selected List of Books and Journals for the Small Medical Library" [2]. This biennial publication by Alfred Brandon (first released in 1965) was widely regarded as the standard title list relevant to the small medical library [2, 3]. Similar lists still exist in a variety of disciplines, including nursing and veterinary medicine [4-6]. Additionally, individual institutions have described the development of a core journal collection [7]. When

establishing a core list of biomedical journals, it is understood that no individual institution can incur the economic impact of the entire volume of publications available in the biomedical sciences [3]. The scope of publications available may also not be consistent with the curricular emphasis of individual programs.

The LIS Section publishes *Basic Resources for Pharmacy Education* and the companion *Core List of Journals for Libraries that Serve Schools and Colleges of Pharmacy* [8] (also known as the Core Journals List) as guides for developing and maintaining pharmacy-affiliated library collections. Development of the Core Journals List provides librarians who serve those programs and pharmacy faculty and who are responsible for procurement of resources with an objective resource to support collection development.

The LIS Section introduced the first edition of the Core Journals List in 1997 as a complement to the *Basic Resources for Pharmacy Education*. An ad hoc committee (later a work group) created the list as a tool to support collection development for a school or college of pharmacy and to assist with accreditation. The decision of which titles to purchase and how the list was used for accreditation would depend on the type and size of the library. The LIS Section subsequently updated the list four times using an evolving methodology to best capture the journal titles that are most useful to pharmacy education.

The first Core Journals List, published in 1997, was developed by comparing journal holdings of 11 member libraries or drug information centers. Only print journals were considered for inclusion. The final list included print titles that were held by at least 7 of the 11 participating institutions. Titles held by nearly all of the libraries of work group members were indicated as recommended for first purchase on the list. This original list included 89 journals, 19 of which were indicated as first purchase recommendations [9]. The second edition of the list, published in 2003, was compiled in a similar manner, although electronic titles were considered and work group members used the collections of 10 colleges and schools of pharmacy as reference points. The final title list included 109 titles and 29 first purchase recommendations [10].

The methods were revised significantly for the third edition of the Core Journals List, published in 2009. Work group members evaluated for inclusion peer-reviewed titles published in English and indexed in MEDLINE or International Pharmaceutical Abstracts (IPA) with a focus on pharmacy and/or pharmaceutical sciences. This list also included titles that were proposed and voted on by LIS Section members that did not meet the criteria but were considered critical to a pharmacy library collection. The "recommended for first purchase" qualifier was removed so that schools and accreditors would not interpret this distinction as "required in the collection" [11]. The fourth edition was published one year later, and work group members followed the methods defined for developing the previous edition [12].

At the 2012 AACP annual meeting, members of the LIS Section discussed updating the Core Journals List for publication and created a new work group charged to complete this task [13]. The objective of this report is to document the methods used to create the fifth edition of the Core Journals List, present the process for updating the list, and introduce the final list of titles.

## METHODS

A work group of four pharmacy librarians and three pharmacists who specialize in providing drug information prepared the 2013 published revision of the Core Journals List. All work group members were active in the AACP LIS Section and practiced in academic settings. The work group was diverse in terms of geographic location, program size, and institutional mission (i.e., research-focused, teaching-focused). After the work group formed in August 2012, it adopted a timeline with the following significant checkpoints: finalize the criteria for journal inclusion in October 2012, finalize the revision process in December 2012, complete the first draft in April 2013, and complete the final draft in June 2013. The work group's objective was to define a process, including identifying inclusion criteria, that could be used for the 2013 and future revisions.

Compared to previous versions of the list, members agreed that expanded coverage of medical journals relating to clinical pharmacy practice was needed because of the evolving role of the pharmacist in providing direct patient care. It was important to the team that key journals from related disciplines—such as physician assistantship, nursing, and optometry—be included in recognition of the increasing importance of interprofessional collaboration and cooperation. Due to the inclusion of additional journals in order to better reflect the evolving role of the pharmacist on the interdisciplinary health care team, the group anticipated the list would increase in size from approximately 75 journals to around 200 or 300. The group envisioned the list as a guide for those who manage library collections that serve colleges or schools of pharmacy. Furthermore, the work group stipulated that the list should be a useful and applicable overview of the most important journals for pharmacy education that could be customized in order to serve institutional mission, vision, and demographics. As in the past, the list should not serve as an accreditation benchmark or a complete directory to the pharmacy literature.

The work group defined five domains of interest: (a) basic sciences, medicinal chemistry, and pharmacology; (b) pharmaceuticals; (c) social and administrative sciences; (d) pharmacy practice; and (e) related disciplines. Individual group members then generated topics of interest in each of these domains, subject to review by the entire group (Table 1). Some selected topics were researched but ultimately did not yield any titles included on the final list. All topics are included in Table 1.

The work group then collaboratively defined the criteria for journal identification and inclusion in order to objectively and systematically evaluate titles for the list. Three criteria were used to identify possible peer-reviewed journals to include in the list: (1) being currently in press, (2) having full text published in English, and (3) being indexed in MEDLINE as having a major focus on a Medical Subject Heading (MeSH) corresponding to a topic of interest. These criteria provided a framework for a consistent approach among work group members and assured that only relevant publications would be reviewed. Journals that satisfied all identifying criteria were assessed for inclusion criteria. Inclusion criteria were selected to ensure the usefulness and applicability of the list: (1) a 2011 impact factor (IF) greater than 5, (2) a stated focus on pharmacy or medications in the journal description, or (3) status as an official publication of a major professional organization. These criteria were selected to maximize usefulness of the list and applicability to a broad group of collection users. The IF threshold was determined based on a review of the IF for appropriate journals in several relevant domains. Journals that satisfied two of three inclusion criteria were included in the list with one exception: Journal titles meeting the single criterion of stated focus on pharmacy or medications were compared with the holdings of work group members, which informed inclusion in the Core Journals List.

Following development of the identification and inclusion criteria, topics were distributed among all work group members for data collection. Researchers used a similar process to complete the project for their topics. First, they searched the National Library of Medicine (NLM) catalog with PubMed, using two or three independent MeSH terms. Professional expertise was used to determine applicable MeSH terms and to select terms that most appropriately captured journals within the topic. For example, "dermatology OR skin" was employed to identify journals for the term "dermatology." Filters were set to restrict to articles with the term mapped as a MeSH major topic and to include only journals currently published in English and indexed in MEDLINE. For example, after applying these filters, the dermatology search above yielded 27 journals for review. Work group members manually reviewed each journal to verify that the full articles were published in English. All remaining journals were then assessed for inclusion criteria. The assigned member reviewed the journal description in PubMed or on the journal website to confirm a pharmacy or medication focus and status as an official society or organization publication. IF data were gathered from the journal websites or from Journal Citation Reports through Web of Knowledge. In addition to including peer-reviewed publications, the work group included pharmacy trade publications (e.g., *Drug Topics*, *Pharmacy Times*), which are important for a well-rounded pharmacy collection. Since most identifying and inclusion criteria would not be relevant for trade publications, work group

**Table 1**  
Breakdown of core journals list by domain and topic\*

Domain	Topic	Journals (n)	
Basic sciences, medicinal chemistry, and pharmacology (52 journals)	Biochemistry	4	
	Biology	8	
	Chemistry	3	
	Drug design, discovery, development	6	
	Medicinal chemistry	3	
	Molecular medicine	4	
	Pharmacology	20	
	Toxicology	4	
	Pharmaceutics (15 journals)	Biotechnology	1
		Compounding	1
		Dosage forms	6
Nanotechnology		1	
Pharmaceutical analysis		0	
Pharmaceutical manufacturing		0	
Pharmaceutical technology		2	
Pharmacokinetics and pharmacodynamics		4	
Physical chemistry		0	
Social and administrative sciences (13 journals)		Economics and pharmacoeconomics	1
		Ethics	5
	Health care administration	2	
	Pharmacy education	2	
	Public health	2	
	Social and behavioral aspects of practice	1	
	Pharmacy practice (117 journals)	Complementary and alternative medicine	2
		General pharmacy	9
		Law	1
		Medical informatics	3
		Therapeutic areas	102
Related disciplines (17 journals)		Dentistry	0
		Dietetics, nutrition	0
		Health administration	2
		Nursing	4
		Optometry	0
		Physician assistants	1
	Psychology	5	
	Veterinary medicine	5	
	Pharmacy trade publications	11	
	Total publications	225	

\* Some noted topics were researched but ultimately did not yield any titles included on the final list.

members reviewed their collections and voted on inclusion of these periodicals.

Following completion of the first draft of the list, each domain was distributed to a content expert external to the work group for peer review. Peer reviewers had to be working in academic pharmacy and be well recognized for their expertise in the particular domain. If a single reviewer was not sufficient to evaluate an entire domain, a second reviewer was solicited. Some topics (e.g., pediatrics, toxicology) resulted in either a low or excessive number of titles; therefore, additional review was sought for these topics. Peer reviewers were instructed to review their domains for completeness (i.e., Were any important journals missing?), appropriateness (i.e., Should any journals of minor importance be removed?), duplication (i.e., Do any journals closely duplicate each other in terms of aim, scope, and value?), and any other issues regarding the list. Reviewers were free to recommend additions, deletions, and/or reorganization based on their expertise. The work group evaluated the peer-review suggestions and accepted or rejected them by consensus. The group presented the final Core Journals List to the LIS Section at the 2013 AACP Annual Meeting, and it was unanimously approved. The section endorsed a plan

to use the developed criteria as a basis for a future revision planned for the 2015/16 academic year.

## RESULTS

The work group generated an initial list of 844 journals meeting identifying criteria. Of those, 579 were excluded for failure to satisfy inclusion criteria. In addition, 67 were excluded and 16 were added based on recommendations from peer review, yielding a final count of 214 peer-reviewed journals. An additional 11 pharmacy trade publications were deemed of value in the field and were included in a separate section of the list, yielding a final list of 225 periodicals [8].

## DISCUSSION

While the fifth edition of the Core Journals List did retain the previous edition's reliance on identifying titles for peer-reviewed periodicals indexed in MEDLINE with an emphasis on pharmacy and English language availability, it stands in contrast to previous editions of the Core Journals List because of substantial changes to the identification and inclusion criteria, the addition of a peer-review process, and the

expansion of subject coverage. This significant change to the selection process allowed for a final list of titles that reflected a broader collection of core journal titles fundamental to the evolving nature of the discipline, from those foundational to the science and practice of pharmacy to selected trade publications that serve as an information source fundamental to some areas of pharmacy. Incorporating a system of peer review by content experts was critical to the integrity, applicability, and utility of the final list. The section will need to continue efforts to review and revise the list to ensure that the list remains congruent with developments in pharmacy education.

There were several limitations in the execution of this project. The group worked diligently to ensure that the process of title identification and inclusion was unbiased and objective. However, the process allowed subjective interpretation of the inclusion criteria, specifically regarding degree of focus on pharmacy or medications. Ultimately, group members relied on their professional judgment and weighed recommendations from peer reviewers for refinement of the final list. While the search criteria required identifying MeSH terms to retrieve the most relevant titles, work group members observed that some key titles (e.g., *British Medical Journal*) were not identified in the initial search with the predefined criteria. These titles were added at the time of peer review if agreed upon by the work group. The work group felt that titles indexed in MEDLINE were appropriate for developing a core collection for pharmacy education. However, other secondary databases (e.g., EMBASE, CINAHL, IPA) index titles that are not indexed in MEDLINE and would be appropriate for identifying periodical titles. While the criteria developed for this revision will be useful for future updates, lowering the IF threshold could yield additional key journals, and a more structured approach to the search could help reduce the number of journals excluded only after peer review.

Based on the experiences of updating the Core Journals List in 2013, the work group determined that future revisions should occur every three years based on a similar process, to match the publication cycle of the *Basic Resources for Pharmacy Education* list. The work group will continue to fine-tune the specific criteria and assess the current list in order to determine its usability.

## CONCLUSION

Since its development in 1997, the AACP Core Journals List has been a useful journal-oriented collection development and assessment tool available to librarians, drug information pharmacists, and anyone interested in pharmacy literature. The process of revising the methodology for the fifth edition allowed the scope of the list to better reflect the growing interprofessionalism of pharmacy, which, in turn, impacts pharmacy education. The peer-review process used to create the list generated a level of quality assurance not previously incorporated into the

list's development. By improving the development of the Core Journals List, a list has been created to better support the needs of pharmacy education and the evolving role of the pharmacist in the US health care system.

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