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Sharing Community Engagement in Pharmacy – An Invitation

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Introduction

In the 1980's, a community engagement movement began to emerge in higher education, asserting that a goal of the American university should be to restore its original purpose, that of preparing graduates for a life of involved and committed citizenship.¹ This renewed focus on community engagement has resulted in work that has sought to connect learners, coursework and research initiatives with the broader community.

Within academic pharmacy, community engagement through service learning has been a focus of many schools.² As well, practice-based research has increased in both its scope and depth, particularly with the development of practice-based research networks.³ Funding to support community-engaged work has also expanded over the years.⁴

Defining Community Engagement in the Pharmacy Setting

Defining community engaged scholarship and its value in academic settings has received increasing attention over the last decade. Community-Campus Partnerships for Health (CCPH) provides comprehensive resources for individuals and institutions through its website (www.ccpb.info). Figure 1 outlines the intersections between community-engagement and teaching, research and service.⁵

In pharmacy, community-engagement is prevalent, but certainly not limited to, the work of academic institutions. Many examples of community engagement on the part of pharmacy practices or individual practitioners exist. This may be in collaboration with or independent of an academic institution. *INNOVATIONS in pharmacy* seeks to share not only those forms of community engagement that emanate from academic institutions, but represent the impact that pharmacy practice has made on the communities it serves.

Learning through Engagement

Service learning is likely the most common and defined expression of community engaged learning. It is a structured learning experience that combines community service with preparation and reflection. Service is in response to community-identified needs. Students learn about the context in which service is provided, the connection between their service and their academic coursework, and their roles as citizens. Seifer has articulated several ways in which service learning differs from traditional clinical education in the health professions.⁶

- Service-learning strives to achieve a balance between service and learning objectives - partners must negotiate the differences in their needs and expectations;
- An emphasis is placed on addressing community concerns and broad determinants of health;
- Service-learning involves a principle-centered partnership between communities and health professions schools;
- Traditional definitions of "faculty," "teacher" and "learner" are intentionally blurred;
- Reflection facilitates the connection between practice and theory and fosters critical thinking.
- The provision of health services is not often the most important factor. In service-learning, students place their roles as health professionals and citizens in a larger societal context

Creighton University School of Pharmacy and Health Professions has successfully implemented an elective course which engages students with Native American communities.⁷ The 2-credit service learning experience was implemented in fall 2003 and is titled *Learning Through Reflective Service: The Native American Experience*. Course design immerses students in Native culture, issues and health services through a learning experience that blends didactic instructions with learning experiences led by members of the community. The capstone experience is a week-long immersion with the Navajo Nation in Chinle, AZ, developed collaboratively between Creighton- and Chinle-based course faculty members. This immersion combines student learning with service activities, which are developed based on the needs of the community. A goal of this community-engaged learning experience is to stimulate and develop the desire to advocate for underserved populations and stimulate the desire to practice in the Indian Health Service or with tribal clinics. As of 2010, the course is in its eighth year, continues to increase enrollment each year, and currently has 3 graduates in the Commissioned Corps, 1 IHS resident, and several more in school who are on track for an IHS career.

Engaging Communities in Research

A hallmark of community-engaged scholarship is that scholarship is conducted "with" the community, not simply

“in” the community. With respect to research, examples of community-engaged scholarship are “community-based participatory research (CBPR)” and “practice-based research.” The Kellogg Foundation describes CBPR as a collaborative approach to research that equitably involves all partners in the research process and recognizes the unique strengths that each brings. It begins with a topic of importance to the community and has the aim of combining knowledge with action.

Development of a tool to evaluate risk for loss of pharmacy services in small rural communities provides an illustration of community-engaged scholarship.⁸ Concerns regarding trends in pharmacy closings in small rural Minnesota towns was being articulated not only by the pharmacy community, but rural community leaders as well. Certain community leaders brought these concerns to faculty, seeking assistance in finding potential solutions. Initial research focused on an evaluation that could be used by stakeholders to prospectively identify communities potentially at high risk for loss of local pharmacy services. The tool was developed in collaboration with community-based experts knowledgeable about the realities of delivering pharmacy services in rural communities. The work involved in the development of this tool ultimately led to partnerships between the University of Minnesota and community leaders in southwestern Minnesota, creating a workgroup focused on exploring opportunities to increase the viability of pharmacy services in the region. This work connected faculty, health-systems administrators, community pharmacists and extension services staff for the purpose of seeking solutions to a problem that local leaders deemed a “community problem” rather than considering it a pharmacy problem or even a health care problem.

Engagement through Community Service

Community engagement through service can be an important mechanism to address critical public health issues. While an area of emphasis for many universities or schools of pharmacy, many pharmacists also actively engage in this work. This may be via initiatives emanating from their practice or through collaborations with community-based organizations with service missions with which they hold a personal affinity.

The work of Goodrich Pharmacy in St. Francis, Minnesota, is an example of a pharmacy practice bringing an engagement philosophy to the community it services.⁹ After learning about problems associated with disposal of unwanted medications at a national pharmacy conference, the pharmacy partnered with the local police to plan and hold a medication disposal event. Interest in proper disposal

information on the part of patients who expressed concerns regarding community septic systems added to the staff’s motivation to create this service initiative. The event provided patients an opportunity to safely dispose of their unused medications, but also become more aware of trends police had recognized in prescription drug abuse in the teenage population. Ultimately this community service work served as a foundation for similar efforts around the state, coordinated by the Minnesota Pharmacists Foundation, through its AWAReX program (www.awarerx.org).

Conclusion

These examples illustrate the value of community-engaged work. Through collaborations between academics, practitioners and communities, a community of learning is established which informs and benefits all. Besides the issues of the world and civic culture benefitting from the cooperation of academics, faculty learn from this engagement, gaining a better understanding of the importance and complexity of civic issues. Additionally, as scholars engage themselves in public problems they can generate research questions that they could not have generated without public encounters. As we consider the future of engagement in schools of pharmacy and in collaboration with our community partners, perhaps the importance of the scholarship of engagement is best summarized by Bronowski who stated, “The issue is not whether scholarship will be applied but whether the work of scholars will be directed toward humane ends.”¹⁰

The meaning of education, scholarship, and engagement in the community has changed over the past century; however the same words that were used to describe the mission of higher learning - such as practicality, reality, and serviceability - are now used to describe the scholarship of engagement. The purpose of this engagement is to connect resources to important civic and social issues in order to take powerful, resourceful, and meaningful steps of action. *INNOVATIONS* looks forward to disseminating the stories of how pharmacists and pharmacy institutions are contributing to society through engagement with the communities they serve.

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Figure 1: Community-Engaged Teaching, Research and Service⁵

