LETTER

Dietary Supplement Use, Knowledge, and Perceptions Among Student Pharmacists

To the Editor: The recent article by Axon and colleagues evaluated dietary supplement use between student pharmacists and the general population, student pharmacists’ knowledge of dietary supplements, and student pharmacists’ attitude on their dietary supplement education. One of the authors’ most important conclusions was student pharmacists considered their dietary supplement education to be inadequate. Although more education in pharmacy curriculums on dietary supplements may be necessary, it is our intent to provide additional perspectives on the author’s methods used to evaluate student pharmacists’ respective knowledge and attitudes.

Four year pharmacy programs typically consist of a first year (P1) curriculum in which student pharmacists reinforce and build on their basic biological sciences, as seen with this surveyed student pharmacists’ curriculum at the University of Arizona College of Pharmacy. Axon and colleagues administered this survey to first-, second-, and third-year (P1, P2, and P3) student pharmacists before a regularly scheduled class of the fall semester. Further, the authors detailed the student pharmacists do not receive didactic teaching of dietary supplements until the spring semester of their second year (P2). Therefore, only third year (P3) student pharmacists would have received their complete didactic teaching at the time this study concluded students considered their education on dietary supplements to be inadequate.

As a single center study, detail of the quality of the didactic teachings of dietary supplements provided in the second year of the curriculum would have been of value in interpretation of the authors’ conclusion. In a 2015 study at Northeast Ohio Medical University College of Pharmacy, the researchers implemented a sophisticated pharmacy course that provided scientific, therapeutic, and clinical principles regarding the use of natural products. After years of feedback, modification, and improvement of the course, students’ scores demonstrated an increase in their knowledge of natural products, ability to evaluate scientific literature, and identify drug-food/herbal interactions.

Lastly, more information regarding the faculty credentials and system of providing the dietary supplement didactic teachings would also been of value. Machen and colleagues’ study demonstrates an elective nutrition course taught by a doctor of pharmacy student who was also a registered dietician was useful to students in the course, and highly recommended to their peers. In another college of pharmacy, pharmacy students’ knowledge of dietary supplements improved significantly following a small-group self-guided active-learning format for a complementary and alternative medicine curriculum and subsequent peer presentations.

Mikel Marku,a
Bryan C. McCarthy Jr., PharmD, MSb
a Chicago State University College of Pharmacy, Chicago, Illinois
b The University of Chicago Medicine, Chicago, Illinois

REFERENCES