VIEWPOINTS

Pharmacy Faculty Workforce: Increasing the Numbers and Holding to High Standards of Excellence

Steven W. Leslie, PhD
Chair, Council of Deans, American Association of Colleges of Pharmacy
College of Pharmacy, University of Texas at Austin

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When Larry R. Faulkner became president of The University of Texas at Austin in 1998, he made a statement in one of his first meetings with deans and other university administrators that stuck with me. To paraphrase, he said that outstanding faculty members pursue careers at universities where they can work with outstanding students, and outstanding students come to universities where they can study with outstanding faculty members. His remarks are important for our entire pharmacy academic community to consider. President Faulkner’s emphasis was on graduate students and undergraduate students interested in the pursuit of scholarship, but his message was meant to focus on critical issues of quality for the entire university. He also made the point that the balance of excellence between faculty members and students is critical; if excellence in one is lost, a decline in the other will soon follow.

If, on a national scale, we expect to recruit increasing numbers of highly talented PharmD graduates into our graduate and post-PharmD training programs, and ultimately into academic careers, then we must have excellent faculty scholars to attract them and we must have academic career opportunities that excite them. There have been numerous studies and reports over many decades describing the ever-increasing pharmacy faculty shortfalls. JoLaine Draugalis, in her 2004 AACP incoming president’s address, “Back to Basics: The Three Rs for Pharmacy Faculty” emphasized that we must work together as an academy to increase the numbers of our pharmacy graduates who pursue graduate studies and post-PharmD training. JoLaine recommended in her address that we focus on 3 phases of faculty development to include “(1) preparing and recruiting entry level faculty, (2) developing and retaining current faculty, and (3) renewal–lifelong career management and development.”

Faculty member quality and developing large numbers of excellent faculty members need to be at the top of the pharmacy academy’s priority list as we focus on strategies to educate, recruit, and retain our next generation of pharmacy faculty. This will require a persistent strategy of pursuing excellence in academic standards and traditions and recognizing that this is vital to our future. As described in the report of the 2003-04 AACP Research and Graduate Affairs Committee, “Pharmacy Scholarship Reconsidered” and in many previous reports over many years, a culture of scholarship lies at the heart of excellence.

Yet, there are significant practical factors that pressure us to compromise, to lessen our focus on excellence, and to accept limitations on what we may expect of current and future pharmacy faculty members. Pharmacy education is facing a continuing decline of PharmD graduates interested in pursuing graduate education. We already have existing faculty shortages, our faculty face heavy workloads, and there are significant teaching and practice demands that limit the ability of pharmacy practice faculty to pursue scholarship. Many existing colleges/schools of pharmacy are experiencing declining financial resources that may limit their capability to create, sustain, or enhance a scholarly environment. Faculty shortages, heavy faculty workload, and financial pressures are also impacting new colleges/schools wanting to broaden their scholarly opportunities.

So, the question is, do we have solutions to offer that can help us increase the number and the quality of candidates for our next generation of pharmacy faculty? The answer is that we do. However, we must consider long term, focused strategies that involve a large percentage of colleges and schools of pharmacy nationally, and we must have support from and involvement of the entire pharmacy academy.

Corresponding Author: Steven W. Leslie, PhD. Address: College of Pharmacy, The University of Texas at Austin, 1 University Station, A1900, Austin, TX 78712-0120. Tel: 512-471-7428. Fax: 512-471-8783. E-mail: sleslie@mail.utexas.edu
To initiate the process, the AACP Council of Deans (COD) along with the Council of Faculties (COF), and in partnership with Rodney Carter, 2005-2006 COF chair, have formed a joint Task Force on Faculty Workforce. This task force will be a long-standing task force that is charged with performing long-term analyses (perhaps 10 to 15 years) of faculty “pipeline” issues for the purpose of establishing the next generation of pharmacy faculty. The task force’s continuing work will focus on a culture of scholarship and a culture of professionalism in pharmacy. The work of the task force should be critically reviewed and considered to assist future AACP presidents, COD chairs, COF chairs and AACP standing committees in setting charges relating to faculty workforce issues to complement and extend the work of the task force. During the first year (FY2005-06) the task force charges will be to:

1. Assess our current faculty workforce to project needs for the future. This will include an analysis, assisted by AACP staff, to forecast such things as faculty retirement and turnover and expansion of the academy. An analysis of curricular trends and the associated needs for faculty should be included.

2. Perform a roles analysis of schools: those that have graduate programs and those that do not and how partnerships in postgraduate education and academic preparation can be developed among these.

3. Respond to recommendations from the 2004-05 AACP Academic Affairs Committee.

   The 2004-2005 Academic Affairs Committee, anticipating the formation of the Task Force on Faculty Workforce, included in its report 3 specific recommendations for action by the task force. This year the task force’s charge is to examine these recommendations and consider mechanisms for implementation. These recommendations include (a) compiling and assessing models of academic internships that may lead PharmD graduates into graduate education, (b) establishing processes to evaluate and assess model programs and initiatives and measures that over time will give valuable data regarding the successes of participating students in securing faculty positions in colleges/schools of pharmacy, and, (c) surveying Association members who have pursued academic life after being in the profession in another capacity to learn how to best encourage more individuals currently in the practice of pharmacy, pharmaceutical industry, or other capacity to consider a change to an academic career.

4. Recommend charges to the COD and COF chairs for the next year’s work of the committee and possibly forward recommendations for charges for AACP standing committees to the AACP president.

Soon after Lucinda Maine became our AACP executive vice president, she asked me what I considered to be the most important issue that we must address for the future of pharmacy education. My quick response was how do we develop strategies for all colleges and schools of pharmacy to work together to establish our next generation of pharmacy faculty? I believe that excellence in pharmacy education does, indeed, reside within the faculty. It should be a top priority for all of us in pharmacy education to work together to ensure that the next generation of pharmacy faculty is outstanding.

REFERENCES


