

Reflection: Enhancing Research and Training Through Interprofessional Collaboration and Mentorship



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Throughout pharmacy school, I had the opportunity to take part in a variety of different interprofessional education events. Although all were valuable and worthwhile, it wasn't until I began collaborating with other professional disciplines through research that I witnessed the real power of interprofessional collaboration and the positive impact it could have on both research design and patient care.

I participated in an independent research project during the final two years of my doctor of pharmacy (PharmD) training. Knowing I wanted to participate in research, I signed up for a Research Design elective class. I was paired with a faculty mentor, Daniel Ventricelli², PharmD, MPH, and was tasked with designing a research question. When deciding on a project topic, I considered different areas of substance use disorder (SUD) research, including harm reduction and SUD treatment, which I eventually narrowed down to buprenorphine medications for opioid use disorder (OUD). The goal of our research was to conduct a survey to better understand pharmacist dispensing behavior regarding buprenorphine-containing medications. We decided to utilize the Theory of Planned Behavior as a theoretical framework for

designing a survey to better understand the behavior of pharmacists in this context, and the project moved along smoothly until we reached the survey development phase. While Dr. Ventricelli and I were confident about the content of the survey, as well as the topics we wanted to explore with our questions, we struggled with exactly how to ask the right questions in a way that would allow us to appropriately evaluate pharmacists' behavioral intentions. Furthermore, we realized we were creating something that could have far-reaching implications and wanted to make sure it was done to the highest level of rigor. It was at this point that we decided to reach out to and partner with Alysson Light, PhD³, a behavioral scientist with extensive experience in theoretical modeling, survey design and statistical analysis. Dr. Light's collaboration was vital to ensuring the study was carried out with the utmost confidence; however, incorporating another discipline elevated the analysis and interpretation to a level I didn't expect.

While independently working with the data and running some statistics myself, I periodically met with Dr. Light to discuss the preliminary results. We spent several hours discussing how to interpret the data, and while Dr. Ventricelli and I brought a pharmacy-focused perspective to the results, she brought social and behavioral science concepts I had not fully considered. Working with Dr. Light and incorporating her social and behavioral science expertise exposed me to new theories and ideas that helped me interpret the data from a completely new perspective. One such concept that we discussed was the potential effects of social pressure on pharmacists and how that could impact their intentions to dispense buprenorphine. Our interprofessional collaboration pushed me to think outside of the box, and as a team, we analyzed the results from a more holistic perspective, combining our backgrounds from both pharmacy and the social sciences.

Throughout my PharmD training, I have been provided interprofessional learning

opportunities with other healthcare students: occupational therapy, physical therapy, nursing, and medical students. These opportunities provided insight into working with these professionals within the workplace; however, I never realized the impact that social and behavioral sciences could have on patient care. Working with Dr. Light through my research project drastically changed my ideas about the project and the meaning behind our results. Recognizing the importance of the social and behavioral sciences, we should incorporate these skills into pharmacy education and research, and even more importantly, ensure that students in pharmacy and social science training programs are provided more opportunities to work together.

Interprofessional collaboration as a student has helped me become a stronger and more well-rounded healthcare professional. These past experiences, and in particular my research project involving Drs. Light and Ventricelli, taught me how to think outside my usual pharmacy box. I have no doubt my research project was made better from the interprofessional collaboration, and experiences offered to students, and institutions should encourage collaboration across an even greater number of practice areas and disciplines. Additionally, interprofessional collaboration should not be limited to educational events, but strategically incorporated into student research experiences when possible. Something amazing happens when you bring together individuals with different knowledge, experiences and practice disciplines. Research conducted in this open atmosphere has the potential to reach previously untapped heights.

References

1. This article was written in May 2020, when Kayla was a student completing her PharmD
2. Daniel Ventricelli, PharmD, MPH is an Assistant Professor Clinical Pharmacy at University of the Sciences in Philadelphia, PA
3. Alysson Light, PhD, is an Assistant Professor of Psychology at University of the Sciences in Philadelphia, PA