BACKGROUND

Pharmaceutical industry-based postgraduate training programs aim to prepare Pharm.D.s to pursue a career within various disciplines of the pharmaceutical industry. Over the past 20 years, there has been a significant increase in the presence and interest level for these programs, however, a study conducted by Yung et al. indicated that there was a high degree of variability among pharmacy schools in terms of faculty support and availability of opportunities for pharmacy students to gain experience in the pharmaceutical industry. In 2005, a survey of 147 Rutgers Pharmaceutical Industry Fellowship (RPIF) Program candidates revealed that there were many sources of information available regarding the RPIF Program and career opportunities for pharmacists in the pharmaceutical industry. However, the perceived effectiveness of these sources was not evaluated. The RPIF Program, the largest pharmaceutical industry-based postgraduate training program in the nation, expends considerable energy and resources to build awareness among pharmacy students of various pharmaceutical industry opportunities. This study investigated which awareness-building methods are most effective.

OBJECTIVES:

Primary Objective: To evaluate the awareness level of the RPIF Program among current RPIF fellows when they were Pharm.D. candidates in their final year of pharmacy school.

Secondary Objective: To evaluate the information available to Pharm.D. candidates regarding career opportunities available within the pharmaceutical industry.

METHODS

A 16-question survey was administered electronically via Zoomerang to sixty-eight Pharm.D. fellows currently participating in the RPIF Program.

1. Questionnaire responses were anonymous.
2. Raw data was collected electronically from October 19, 2006 to October 25, 2006.
3. The questionnaire data was analyzed to identify respondents:
   a. Background knowledge prior to interviewing at the ASHP Midyear Meeting
   b. Awareness of the RPIF Program and career opportunities for pharmacists in the pharmaceutical industry
   c. Sources of information that were useful regarding the RPIF Program and pharmaceutical industry career options
   d. Assessment of which components of the RPIF Program were appealing versus other industry fellowship programs

RESULTS

Figure 1: Respondents' Perceptions of Information Received Regarding Pharmaceutical Industry Careers

- 47% of respondents indicated that they received sufficient information regarding pharmaceutical industry careers (n=26).
- 13% of respondents indicated that they did not receive sufficient information regarding pharmaceutical industry careers (n=10).
- 90% of respondents indicated that their initial sources of information were RPIF Fellows/Alumni (n=37).

Figure 2: Awareness of Pharmaceutical Industry Career Options Prior to Interviewing for Fellowship

- 63% indicated that they were aware of career opportunities within the pharmaceutical industry.
- 37% were not aware of career opportunities within the pharmaceutical industry.

Figure 3: Initial Information Source regarding RPIF Program

- 20% of respondents indicated that they were aware of the RPIF Program from their Pharmaceutical Industry Fellowship Information Day (n=12).
- 14% of respondents indicated that they were aware of the RPIF Program from their Medical Information Day (n=8).
- 6% of respondents indicated that they were aware of the RPIF Program from their APHa Annual Meeting (n=4).

Figure 4: Information Sources Contributing to Interest in the RPIF Program

- 30% of respondents indicated that they were interested in the RPIF Program due to coursework (n=18).
- 20% of respondents indicated that they were interested in the RPIF Program due to a faculty member or preceptor (n=12).
- 10% of respondents indicated that they were interested in the RPIF Program due to a friends/classmates (n=6).

Figure 5: Utilizing Fellowship Information Day towards Pursuing a Career within the Pharmaceutical Industry

- 50% of respondents indicated that they were able to gain more information about pharmaceutical industry careers in interviews (n=30).
- 40% of respondents indicated that they were able to gain more information about pharmaceutical industry careers in interviews (n=24).
- 10% of respondents indicated that they were able to gain more information about pharmaceutical industry careers in interviews (n=6).

DISCUSSION

The survey completion response rate was 93% (63/68 fellows responded).

- 59% of respondents indicated that they received sufficient information regarding career opportunities within the pharmaceutical industry.
- Approximately 94% of respondents indicated that they were aware of Medical Information career options prior to interviewing for the RPIF Program, while fewer were aware of career options in Medical Affairs, Marketing, Regulatory Affairs, Product Safety, and Market Research.

- The majority of respondents indicated that their initial sources of information regarding the RPIF Program were current fellows/alumni of the program (37%), the RPIF Program website (14%), and recruitment/MRM visits (13%).
- Of those respondents who felt that they had not received sufficient information about industry career opportunities (n=26), the most frequently reported reasons for this were (1) lack of faculty support within the pharmacy schools (63%), and (2) no course focused on the pharmaceutical industry within the pharmacy schools (63%).
- The majority of respondents (92%) indicated that pharmaceutical industry rotations/internships were available, while availability of FDA rotations was less common (68%). In most cases, the University arranged for the rotations/internships rather than the students themselves.

LIMITATIONS

- The survey population consisted of a small subset of graduating pharmacists who successfully attained a position in the RPIF Program. Therefore, the results may not be applicable to a broader population of graduating pharmacists.
- Some of the survey questions required respondents to recollect their thoughts to events that had taken place ten months prior to the survey.

CONCLUSIONS

Many respondents reported a lack of sufficient information regarding pharmaceutical industry career opportunities for pharmacists. An opportunity exists to increase awareness of the RPIF Program and pharmaceutical industry career options by emphasizing the diversity of career opportunities, networking, and history of the program. Future efforts should include stratifying survey responses by the pharmacy school/geographic region, as the fellow respondents help determine areas in need of more targeted efforts to increase awareness about the RPIF program.