Background

- Treatment of chronic diseases such as diabetes, hypertension, cancer, and hypercholesterolemia is responsible for 86% of US healthcare spending.
- A common non-pharmacological therapy universal to the prevention and treatment of these diseases is nutritional intervention.
- Pharmacists are the most accessible healthcare professionals, perfectly positioned to deliver nutritional counseling to the 250 million Americans that walk into a pharmacy every week.
- Pharmacist-driven interventions (including behavior modification, DASH diet, lifestyle changes, etc.) have improved patient outcomes in chronic conditions including hypertension, diabetes and obesity.
- Pharmacists’ expanding role in nutritional counseling is evidenced by development of APhA certifications in:
  - Diabetes care
  - Medication therapy management
  - Cardiovascular disease risk management
  - Immunization
- Many healthcare providers, including pharmacists, are not adequately educated to meet this demand, leaving room for improvement in nutrition training and education.

Objective

- To assess pharmacy student and recent alumni attitudes regarding nutrition education in the Rutgers PharmD curriculum and to evaluate opinions regarding the importance of nutritional education to a pharmacist’s daily practice

Methods

- This study was approved by the Rutgers IRB.
- An anonymous survey was sent to Rutgers Ernest Mario School of Pharmacy (EMSOP) students in years one through four as well as alumni from the Class of 2015.
- Survey window was Jan 25, 2016 to Feb 18, 2016
- Used the Qualtrics survey program
- Surveys were distributed via email with an individualized link to current students’ school address and alumni’s personal address.
- Survey questions assessed:
  - Professional year or graduation year
  - Previous nutrition education
  - Current practice site
  - Post-graduate training/certifications
  - Adequacy of nutrition education within EMSOP curriculum
  - Relevance of nutrition education to pharmacy practice
  - Necessary certifications/experience to teach an elective in nutrition
  - Preferred learning method to receive nutrition education
  - Topics that should be covered in a nutrition elective
  - Interest in taking a patient-centered nutrition course if such a course was offered

Results

- 22% student survey response rate, n=188
- 34% alumni survey response rate, n=22
- Current students and alumni lack nutrition education
  - 86% of students had not taken an elective in nutrition within the EMSOP curriculum
  - 96% of students had not taken a college nutrition course outside of the EMSOP curriculum
- Student interest in nutrition education is high
  - 86% of EMSOP students reported they would be interested in taking a patient-centered nutrition course if offered
  - Most students responded that the amount of nutrition education was not adequate
  - Most students view nutrition education as relevant to pharmacy practice
- Alumni opinions were split in regards to the relevance of nutrition education in pharmacy practice
  - Slightly more than not, alumni felt that EMSOP nutrition education was not sufficient
- These results strongly contrast Big 10 deans’ perception of student interests
  - All of the Deans of Assessment of Big 10 pharmacy schools reported student interest to be “very low” in a previous survey

Limitations

- Limitations include small sample size in alumni study, inability to contact alumni beyond the class of 2015, and incomplete responses in both studies

Conclusions

- Students have a strong interest in additional nutrition education
- Student interest in nutrition education at EMSOP appears greater than that observed in a recently reported survey of Big Ten Deans of Assessment
- The results of this study suggest that steps should be taken to increase the amount of nutrition education in pharmacy curricula
- Further research is needed to evaluate alumni perspective on the utility of nutrition education in the practice of pharmacy

References