

Take the Leap: Advantages of Engaging Within Pharmacy Student Associations

Feature Article

Completed 2024

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INTRODUCTION

Volunteering for roles in both my local and national pharmacy student associations has been transformative, significantly boosting my self-confidence. A considerable part of my involvement encompasses various initiatives, such as educational sessions, networking events, annual balls, and white coat ceremonies. Taking on these roles, often with limited background knowledge, required a leap of faith and an eagerness to learn on the job. Each responsibility I shouldered became an opportunity to prove to myself that I was capable of successfully navigating unfamiliar territory. Embracing new challenges, facing uncertainties, and learning from these experiences not only expanded my skill set but also strengthened my self-belief. I strongly encourage any student who is hesitant to engage with pharmacy associations to step out of their comfort zone and take the leap. This was the best decision I could have possibly made, as it resulted in an improvement in my skills, a broadening of my viewpoint, and an increase in my prospects of success in the pharmacy industry.

Serving as the Griffith University Association of Pharmacy Students' (GUAPS) President, and engaging with the National Australian Pharmacy Students' Association (NAPSA) provided me with the chance to connect with students from various Australian universities. In turn, these experiences offered new insights into opportunities and exposure to the diverse landscape of pharmacy across the country. Thereafter, adopting the position of Research Chair allowed me to delve into an area I was previously

unfamiliar with, connecting me with organizations such as the Australian Pharmaceutical Science Association (APSA) and the Society of Hospital Pharmacists of Australia (SHPA). This experience exposed me to the extensive areas of work and research conducted by pharmacists throughout Australia, reaffirming the notion that a pharmacy career extends beyond the confines of community or hospital settings. My efforts in both local and national pharmacy associations have helped me explore the pharmacy industry more broadly and have reinforced my belief in the profession that I chose to pursue.

DISCUSSION

Professional and Personal Development

According to the National Competency Standards Framework for Pharmacists in Australia, "a sound pharmaceutical knowledge base, effective problem-solving, organisational, communication and interpersonal skills, together with an ethical and professional attitude, are essential to the practice of pharmacy".¹ This statement emphasises the industry's active pursuit of individuals who embody these competencies. Although knowledge and competence in pharmacy school are essential, attaining professional attitudes and behaviours is equally crucial in delivering exemplary patient care.² Active engagement with established pharmacy student associations provides unique opportunities to develop the skills required in the pharmacy profession. Examples of these include taking on leadership roles, engaging in project management, and participating in networking activities, amongst others.

Student associations also create a social environment centred on teamwork and cooperation. Collaborating with diverse individuals not only enhances problem-solving skills but also refines communication and interpersonal skills, preparing students for future pharmacy team settings.³ Professional growth also further extends itself to more personal facets. Actively participating in co-curricular activities serves as a visible demonstration of one's abilities and competencies not only to others but also to oneself.⁴ Studies have indicated a positive correlation between students' participation in co-curricular activities and their self-confidence, self-awareness, and self-efficacy.⁵

Supporting Academic Achievement

Such professional and personal development not only improves employability but also promotes skills geared for academic success, including effective time management, prioritisation, and discipline.⁶ Being able to effectively manage academic responsibilities while simultaneously handling work and co-curricular involvement demonstrates not just the acquisition of such skills but also a strong display of resilience.⁶ Increased participation among pharmacy students is associated with a higher likelihood of involvement in leadership roles. These positions facilitate deeper learning, which is expected to yield elevated academic performance and success.⁷

Community Engagement and Experience

Student associations enhance the overall student experience by organising social events, playing a crucial role in building a sense of community, fostering connections and camaraderie among students. These events significantly contribute to the formation of a support network, enabling students to share experiences and cultivate lasting friendships that extend beyond their academic pursuits.⁵ Moreover, the strong social bonds formed within these associations also serve as a valuable means of stress alleviation.⁵

Networking Opportunities

Australian pharmacy student associations actively promote multiple opportunities for students to attend professional networking events, conferences, and trade exhibitions, all of which extend a warm invitation to students and encourage their attendance. Examples of yearly national conferences include the Australian Pharmacy Professional Conference and Trade Exhibition, the National Conference of the Pharmaceutical Society of Australia, and the National Conference of the Society of Hospital Pharmacists of Australia — Medicines Management, amongst others.⁸

Attending conferences provides invaluable insights into current industry trends and advancements, offering a nuanced understanding of the evolving landscape.⁹ Through networking at these events, individuals gain firsthand knowledge of the industry's trajectory and emerging developments, enhancing their capacity to stay informed.⁹ National and local pharmacy student associations also hold events such as workshops, seminars, panel discussions, and networking functions, giving students additional avenues to enrich their learning, expand their professional networks, and engage with experts in the field. Proactively building connections and cultivating relationships with pharmacy professionals at such events is imperative in enhancing employability and achieving better industry alignment.¹⁰ Networking can also improve comprehension of the values, conduct, and behaviours required for professional life in pharmacy.¹¹

Career Exploration

Interacting with industry professionals is instrumental for professional advancement, allowing students to broaden their understanding of diverse career prospects within the pharmacy field. These prospects span various sectors, including community pharmacy, hospital pharmacy, pharmaceutical industry, academia, research, medical writing, professional organisations, government agencies, and military service, amongst others.⁸ Students who have cultivated professional networks gain access to possible mentors and advisors that offer valuable guidance to shape their careers.¹¹ Moreover, exposure to insights from the pharmacy industry empowers students to identify their interests and take proactive steps toward realising their career plans and ambitions.¹¹ The formation of a strong professional identity early in a student's career has been found to enable a successful transition to the workplace and establish confidence in their professional roles.¹² Increasing familiarity with the industry and interacting with pharmacists can inspire students to actively contribute to the field, instilling a strong sense of purpose and commitment to the profession.¹³ Their engagement not only enhances their abilities and personal development as students but also contributes to the overall advancement of the pharmacy profession.

CONCLUSION

Participation in pharmacy student associations is a significant

investment in a student's professional and personal development. This experience instills a strong sense of community and empowerment, which is critical in navigating the pharmacy profession. I highly encourage students to not simply wait for opportunities, but rather, actively search for them and have faith in the possibilities and opportunities that may arise as a result. Students can reach out to their local pharmacy student association and select activities aligned with their interests. Striking a balance is crucial to enjoy the benefits without overwhelming themselves. This time can be used to discover their niche and collaborate with industry professionals who can help them reach their goals. It is important to understand and acknowledge that everyone must start somewhere, so selecting a path that is suitable and aligns with their life is of utmost importance.

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This article has not been peer-reviewed.