Perception of leadership in undergraduate pharmacy students through a mixed methods study.

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Introduction

The General Pharmaceutical Council (GPhC) is the regulatory body for pharmacists, pharmacy technicians and pharmacy premises in the United Kingdom (UK). It introduced new standards for pharmacy professionals in May 2017.[1] These standards will need to be upheld by registrants as well as pre-registration trainees and students who study the pharmacy course in the UK. Effective leadership is one of the new standards. Students studying pharmacy will need to develop leadership skills at university level and build on them throughout their career.

Focal points

- To understand student's current perceptions on leadership
- Almost all students see leadership as important with half currently describing themselves as leaders
- Students see leadership as important but more opportunities need to be created for them to practise their skills

Aims

This study aimed to identify current understanding of leadership in MPharm students.

Objectives

The objectives were to identify the factors that motivate students to take up leadership roles, the barriers involved and gain students suggestions on how to incorporate leadership skills into the undergraduate curriculum.

Methods

A mixed method study was designed, consisting of questionnaires and semi-structured interviews based on previously available used literatures and models. Students in 1st, 2nd 3rd and 4th year of study on an MPharm course at one university were targeted (n=544) through giving out of paper surveys at the end of lectures. Those who were interested in participating in a follow up interview gave their details and a face-to-face interview was arranged, which was recorded and transcribed. Analysis of data was through Microsoft Excel and thematic analysis, using descriptive statistics.

Ethics statement

Ethical approval was granted for this study.

Results

A total of 250 surveys were collected giving a response rate of 46%. Response rate varied by year with a range of 39% to 53% response. A total of 13 interviews were conducted. Almost all (95%, n=240) believed being a leader is important. When asked if they describe themselves as leaders, responses increased by year with 33% (n=16) of 1st years saying yes, increasing to 60% (n=38) of 4th year students (<0.05). Strong communication skills, honesty and listening were skills good leaders were seen to possess. Less than half (42%, n=103) believe they are currently taught to be leaders with group-work, placements and workshops as places where they gained the skills. Involvement in extra-curricular activities such as societies or being a course rep also increased skills. Suggestions to incorporate leadership included more group activities, scenario based learning and students leading workshops. Motivators to take on leadership roles included personal development, incentives and to make a change. Barriers were personal weakness, team working skills and lack of opportunities.

Discussion

This study has shown that leadership is important to students, with understanding of leadership roles increasing throughout the course. More work needs to be done to incorporate opportunities, both in and outside the curriculum, to allow students to increase their leadership skills. These results, however, are limited to students at one institution, so may be influenced by current teaching or experiences. Future work will involve gaining findings from other institutions.

References

1. General Pharmaceutical Council. Standards for pharmacy professionals. 2017. Available at: https://www.pharmacyregulation.org/sites/default/files/standards_for_pharmacy_professionals_may_2017_0.pdf Accessed 21/08/2017

Keywords