Students Gain Exposure to Managed Care Principles at a New School of Pharmacy

According to the Commission to Implement Change (1993),¹ the mission of pharmacy is the rendering of pharmaceutical care.

Consequently, the mission of pharmacy education is to prepare students to render pharmaceutical care. To prepare students to fulfill this mission, pharmacy educators must ensure that students leave school with the requisite knowledge, skills, and abilities to enter practice successfully. With the far-reaching implications of managed care on pharmacy graduates, a logical question to ask is whether students at schools of pharmacy are being exposed to managed care concepts and principles and, if so, to what extent.

Shenandoah University's School of Pharmacy accepted its first class in the fall of 1996. The school offers the Pharm.D. as its sole pharmacy degree and thus will graduate its first class in May 2000. Because the school is new, the curriculum is still evolving. While no one course presently covers all managed care principles and concepts, the present integration of the subject allows for repeated exposures at different points in the curriculum. This approach allows not only for a review of basic managed care concepts, but also for the unique application of managed care principles from the perspective of the specific course taught.

PROFESSIONAL YEAR ONE

At present, the first year of the curriculum exposes students to managed care concepts in one course: Introduction to the Health Care System. In the fall of their first year, students are required to take this two-credit-hour course. Approximately one hour during the semester is devoted to introductory managed care topics. Additionally, the various types of managed care organizations—such as Staff, Group, Network, and Individual

Practice Association—are discussed, including their strengths and weaknesses.

PROFESSIONAL YEAR TWO

During the second year, students study managed care concepts during three courses: Pharmaceutics (three credit hours); Pharmacy Care in Practice (two credit hours); and Drug Literature Evaluation (three credit hours). In the pharmaceutics course discussions include such topics as third-party reimbursement in community pharmacies, including the pharmacy benefit manager's (PBM) role in managed care.

In Pharmacy Care in Practice, two credit hours are devoted to the community pharmacy practice environment. Discussions include a review of the financial impact of managed care on the community practitioner.

The managed care component of Drug Literature Evaluation comprises a discussion of the history and types of managed care organizations. Topics covered in this course include cost containment strategies related to pharmacy, including formulary strategies, disease state management, utilization measures, PBMs, and drug use.

PROFESSIONAL YEAR THREE

During the third professional year, students are exposed to managed care principles in three management courses: Professional Practice Management (three credit hours); Pharmacy Marketing (three credit hours); and Institutional Practice (three credit hours).

Professional Practice Management features discussion of the present health care environment as a result of managed care. Additionally, particular emphasis is placed on strategic planning and on identifying strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats from a community

pharmacy managerial operational viewpoint when operating in an increasingly competitive managed care environment.

The major managed care concept addressed in Pharmacy Marketing is how the changing landscape in the community setting relates to meeting customers' unmet needs in the managed care environment. For example, as dispensing margins decline, niche marketing becomes more important (i.e., compounding, nutrition, screenings, and immunizations).

The Institutional Practice course discusses managed care topics pertaining to hospital pharmacy, including government involvement in health care, the different elements of managed care, and the different components of Medicare.

At the Shenandoah University School of Pharmacy, students are exposed to managed care concepts and principles at several points during their educational experience. The curriculum is predicated upon the principles of design, development, enactment, and assessment. As the third didactic year closes, the curricular enactment will be completed and the curriculum process will be assessed, along with an attempt to identify when and where concepts such as managed care should be taught. Managed care's ever-increasing influence on the pharmacy practice environment dictates that future graduates be taught the principles and concepts of managed care and their role in pharmacy practice.

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