An Inside Look at the Benefits of a Student Pharmacy and Therapeutics (P&T) Committee Competition from the University of Illinois at Chicago

Pharmacy students across the country are faced with a dilemma. How can students enrich their understanding of the complexity of pharmacy practice beyond what is taught in the classroom? Many students obtain part-time jobs and summer internships, but often these jobs do not provide the students with the deeper hands-on experience they need. More professional development is sought, usually outside the classroom.

Five years ago, the University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC) College of Pharmacy Academy of Managed Care Pharmacy (AMCP) Student Chapter developed a Pharmacy & Therapeutics (P&T) Committee Competition to give students a "behind the scenes" experience of the inner workings of a P&T committee. Such a committee in many different pharmacy environments enables pharmacists to demonstrate their clinical expertise in a critical, expanded role vis-à-vis their physician colleagues. The primary mission of the P&T committee is to promote cost-effective and rational drug therapies through a formulary-management system. In doing so, the P&T committee recommends policy to medical staff and administrators about the desired therapeutic use of drugs and other health-related issues. The P&T committee can be considered the backbone of appropriate drug usage for hospital and long-term care pharmacies, pharmacy benefits managers (PBMs), and managed care organizations (MCOs).

The P&T Committee Competition was initiated, developed, and sponsored by the AMCP student chapter and has been held annually at the UIC College of Pharmacy for five years. The competition is designed to simulate a "real world" experience outside the classroom. Past cases have addressed evaluations of:

- pharmaceutical manufacturer proposals on H₂-receptor antagonists, antihyperlipidemic products, and a disease-state management program that centered on use of the manufacturer's osteoporosis treatment drug (1997);

- bundling a group of drugs for preferred status on a formulary (1998);
- use of selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs) in a specific patient population (1999);
- restricting the use of nonsedating antihistamines in a student-based health maintenance organization (HMO) (2000); and
- the use of prescription versus over-the-counter products (2001).

The goals of the P&T Competition are to:

- enhance pharmacy students' understanding of the P&T committee decision-making process;
- further improve student professional skills through research, presentation, and discussion of case-related issues;
- augment student experience and education in formulary design and managed care pharmacy;
- provide students with an opportunity and environment to network with seasoned managed care pharmacy professionals, including alumni; and
- recruit pharmacy students to participate in a professional-organization activity.

In the competition, four students make up a team which represents the pharmacist on P&T committee. Each team must include a first-, second-, and third-year student; the fourth member can be from any pharmacy class. This structure creates an academically diverse team and exposes each student to knowledge levels and thought processes involved in varying stages of educational development. The four competition judges are selected based on various backgrounds, which may include managed care professionals, industry professionals, faculty, and/or alumni. The primary purpose of the selection is to provide a diversity of opinions from different health care settings and professional perspectives.

Each team is presented with the same case-specific scenario, which incorporates many aspects that a "real" P&T committee might encounter. The team is

asked to evaluate the case and develop a proposal to be submitted for committee consideration. The proposal must include a clinical research review, a pharmacoeconomic analysis, and an ethical-issue assessment. Within the clinical evaluation, the case information provided to the students includes the health plan's demographics, current formulary information, percent of members with related disease states, and drug utilization by drug classes under review. In addition, the students are given the current annual expenditures per drug, the amount of drugs used by plan members, the current drug prices including any rebates, and prior physician switch rates to assist them with their pharmacoeconomic analysis. The students also are informed of the use of disease-state management programs, pharmacoeconomic software for their products, and any academic detailing. All of this information may be used to assist the students in performing an ethical analysis. The ultimate goal of the student teams in performing these analyses is to determine if the overall proposal is therapeutically valuable, economically viable, and ethically preferred.

Once the teams have researched and evaluated all of the information, they must prepare a written executive summary and a 35-minute oral presentation for the panel of judges. Each team's write-up must include pertinent clinical data, and the economic and ethical analyses of the overall case, ending with a team decision and rationale to support the final recommendation to the P&T committee. During the first 15 minutes of the oral presentation, each team must explain the written summaries and present the rationale of its findings. During the second 15 minutes, the panel of judges asks a series of standard questions addressing the clinical, economic, and policy aspects of each team's recommendation. The final five minutes are reserved for participant questions and feedback from the judges.

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At the conclusion of the oral presentations, the judges select the first-place team. They use a standard judging criteria to evaluate the quality of the teams' written and verbal presentations, problem solving and critical thinking skills, application of relevant clinical research, and overall coordinated team effort. The winning team is chosen based on its members' ability to think "out of the box" and extract pertinent data in order to synthesize the team's final decision. All participating students learn from each other in a team setting through research, thinking, and presentation experiences, and through constructive feedback from the judges.

The benefits to the students of participating in a P&T Committee Competition are numerous. First, the competition increases student interest in managed care environments and provides an insight into the roles and responsibilities of a managed care pharmacist. Indirectly, the competition promotes consideration of career choices toward managed care pharmacy. The students are given the opportunity to develop and refine research, analytical, and presentation

skills and gain a functional understanding of the P&T committee in a managed care environment. Students learn to use pharmacoeconomic and pharmacotherapeutic evaluations to enhance future decision-making processes as they participate in making "real life" therapeutic recommendations and decisions. In summary, the P&T Competition serves to incorporate student learning into a well-rounded managed care education for student participants.

In October 2000, at the AMCP Educational Conference in San Diego, California, several members of the UIC-AMCP student chapter presented a poster titled "Learning Managed Care Concepts Outside the Classroom: A Pharmacy and Therapeutics Committee Competition." Three chapter officers and two participants from the winning team of the fourth-annual UIC-AMCP P&T Committee Competition developed the poster. This poster-presentation opportunity increased the exposure of the P&T Competition and sparked interest from students in other leading pharmacy schools. Many students expressed interest

in holding their own P&T competition at their respective AMCP student chapters.

The success of the AMCP student P&T Committee Competition led to the development of the first National P&T Committee Competition sponsored by AMCP at the Annual Meeting in Tampa, Florida, this past April. The national competition provides all AMCP student chapters with an excellent learning opportunity and increases interaction among chapters to promote professional and personal growth within the student membership.

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