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Implementation and Assessment of an Elective DEI course for Pharmacy Students

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Objective

To evaluate the effectiveness of an elective course on diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) that was designed to address the lack of existing DEI training and awareness in the PharmD curriculum.

Background

Health inequities impede the provision of healthcare, including in pharmacy. The American Association of Colleges of Pharmacy (AACP) affirms a “commitment to foster an inclusive community an leverage diversity of thought, background, perspective, and experience to advance pharmacy education and improve health.” Thus, educating pharmacy students on how diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) challenges impact their future clinical practice is essential. In 2020, the School of Pharmacy initiated a series of DEI electives to address deficiencies in DEI awareness and a lack of DEI topics in the PharmD curriculum.

Table 1: Course topics

DEI 1 - Power and Privilege	DEI 2 - Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in Healthcare	DEI 3 - Community Engagement Project
Identity	Economic Health	What is Community?
Bias	Disparities and Inequality	Assessing Community
Racism	Racial Health Disparities and Inequality	Need
Privilege	Gender Inequity and	Sustainable
Power	Health Care	Community
Diversity and Inclusion	COVID-19 Health	Development
Equity	Disparities and Inequality in Underserved Populations	Community Impact
		Building and Maintaining a Coalition
		Project presentation

Table 2: What are the most important things you learned?

Themes	Sub-themes (# of comments)	Representative quotes
Knowledge of DEI terminology and concepts	“Diversity, equity, and inclusion” (13) Privilege and/or power (10) Intersectionality (7) Bias (6) Diversity (5) Equity (4) Inclusion (2)	“The most important things that I’ve learned in this class include refining my definitions of what I perceive diversity, equity, and inclusion [to be]. Before this class, these three terms were often jumbled in my head.” “One of the important things I learned about is intersectionality. I did not even know this term existed.”
Understanding the significance and application of DEI concepts	For individual selves (20) In society (15) In health care (5)	“I think that we use diversity as a goal in many aspects of life and business, when diversity is like a band-aid to the true core problem that needs to be addressed. The real issue that as a society we need to work towards is equity and inclusion.”
Listening to others	Understanding others (13) The importance of listening (7)	“The most important thing I learned from this course was hearing others people’s viewpoints and trying to understand their views from their experiences. Personal experience definitions are more powerful than textbook definitions.”
Creating change	Resources and tools (15) Incentive (6)	“So far the most important thing I have learned is I have the power to make a difference in this world.”

Table 3: Describe a time where power dynamics led to suboptimal healthcare

Theme	Subtheme	Representative quotes
Misuse of power by providers towards patients	Dismissive of patient concerns (7) Differential treatment of classes of patient (4)	“Due to our backgrounds, being uninsured, and unaccompanied minors, the doctor brushed off our claims of being sick.”
Power disparity between providers	Physician towards pharmacist (5) Pharmacy company towards pharmacist (2)	My pharmacist explained the repercussions [of prescribing the overdose], but the physician refused to see reason, chiding her by saying "He's the doctor. She's just the pharmacist."
Barriers to health care	Insurance or other finances (13) Language (5) Access (2)	My previous job was a very eye-opening experience. A Spanish speaking new patient came in because she broke her arm and she could not fill out the new patient form because she could not read. The patient was told to come back when she got a translator.

Method

A three-course series was developed and implemented to address DEI topics. The courses were designed to enhance students’ knowledge of DEI topics (“DEI 1: Power and Privilege”); to highlight the importance of DEI within health care and clinical practice (“DEI 2: Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in Healthcare”); and developing individual student projects to address health inequities (“DEI 3: Community Engagement Project”). Instructional methods included in-class discussions based on pre-assigned readings and videos, reflection statements, pre- and post-surveys, and development community engagement proposal. Student comments were analyzed for common themes. This project focuses on the first course.

Results

Post-class survey results of the DEI class showed increased understanding of the terms diversity, equity, and inclusion, and increased comfort in sharing background and cultural experiences (significant for equity, $p=.000905$) Student reflection comments referenced increased knowledge of DEI concepts, awareness of inequities in society, acknowledgement of privilege and intersectionality in their own lives, the importance of sharing experiences with others, and ways to create change.