

# A burgeoning opportunity for future pharmacists

By **Seina P. Lee, PharmD**, and **Joshua J. Gagne, PharmD**

The profession of pharmacy has evolved considerably from the traditional compounding and dispensing roles. Today, numerous career options await student pharmacists, from staff pharmacist jobs in community and hospital pharmacies to research positions in the pharmaceutical industry. Increasing health care costs, coupled with the need for affordable, high-quality care, has created a demand for sophisticated and innovative approaches in pharmacoconomics and outcomes research (PEOR). Pharmacists, equipped with clinical and pharmacological expertise, possess strong foundations for careers in PEOR.

If you are a student pharmacist interested in PEOR and a career in the pharmaceutical industry, managed care, consulting, or academia, you should consider postgraduate outcomes research fellowship programs, which provide training and exposure to various aspects of PEOR in a variety of settings. Similar to residencies and clinical fellowships, PEOR fellowship programs are typically 1- or 2-year commitments awarded to highly motivated and enthusiastic candidates. Currently, there are more than 35 PEOR fellowship programs available through academic institutions, pharmaceutical companies, hospitals, and other nontraditional sites, such as private consulting firms and managed-care organizations.

If you are interested in earning a graduate degree (e.g., master's of science, master's of public health, PhD) upon completing the fellowship, you should consider academically-based programs, which may be degree-conferring or may encourage fellows to

enroll in coursework transferable to a master's degree. If you are interested in advancing your career within the pharmaceutical industry, managed care, or consulting, you should consider fellowships sponsored by such entities, because they are geared toward providing practical research experiences applicable to those settings. You should consider choosing a PEOR fellowship based on your interest and long-term career goals and objectives.

## Diversity of experiences

We are participating in a fellowship administered by the Department of Health Policy (DHP) at Jefferson Medical College in Philadelphia, which has offered PEOR fellowships since 1994. In the program's first year, our primary role is to serve as active members of the DHP Research Team.

The first year has afforded us opportunities to learn about the design, implementation, and communication of outcomes research studies. One of the unique aspects of this program is that specific activities are tailored to fit our backgrounds, areas of research interest, and short- and long-term career goals. In addition, we participate in many of the department's educational initiatives, such as a journal club, research meetings, and health policy forums. We spend the second year engaged in various PEOR activities at the company-sponsored site. The most rewarding aspect of this training has been the diversity of experiences.

Responsibilities and activities change daily, depending on our personal interests and project involvement. Because of the varied backgrounds and

experiences of fellows at the start of the program, the experience gained by each fellow is unique. Most individuals who complete PEOR fellowships report that these programs trained them adequately and that they acquired the skills necessary for becoming effective researchers. These skills are in high demand in PEOR, according to a 2004 *American Journal of Pharmaceutical Education* article by Vittorio Maio, PharmD, and Jennifer Lofland, PharmD.

## A career building block

Student pharmacists and pharmacy residents interested in acquiring the skills to measure the outcomes and value of medical interventions should consider a PEOR fellowship as the next building block in their career development. Even fellows who do not go on to work in traditional outcomes research positions may find that the skills obtained through PEOR fellowships are applicable to other careers. Each year, preliminary interviews for prospective candidates are conducted at the American Society of Health-System Pharmacists' Midyear Clinical Meeting. The application process is similar to that of other fellowship and residency programs.

The best place to learn about the different PEOR fellowship programs is the International Society of Pharmacoconomics and Outcomes Research Web site ([www.ispor.org](http://www.ispor.org)), which contains the most up-to-date directory of fellowships in pharmacoconomics and outcomes research.



*Seina P. Lee, PharmD, is the 2006–2008 Outcomes Research Fellow, and Joshua J. Gagne, PharmD, is the 2005–2007 Outcomes Research Fellow for Ortho-McNeil Janssen Scientific Affairs, LLC.*

