

Dual degrees in pharmacy:

One answer to growing career options for pharmacists

Hard work, but worth the payoff

By Marsha K. Millonig

Career options continue to grow for pharmacists, and there is no end in sight to the opportunities available. As noted in the report from the October 2001 invitational Conference on the Professionally Determined Need for Pharmacy Services, sponsored by the Pharmacy Manpower Project, the need for pharmacists in 2020 will be approximately 157,000 more than the number projected to be available.

The conference findings were based upon several assumptions, including that pharmacy's mission is to help people make the best use of their medications, technology and support personnel will be utilized to the fullest extent possible, and payment for pharmacists' patient care services will be achieved on a wide scale in the next decades. The conference proceedings, available at www.aacp.org/docs/mainnavigation/resources/4634_needsconferencefinalreport.pdf, are powerful evidence that long-term career opportunities will be plentiful for pharmacy students of both today and tomorrow.

What is more difficult to predict is how quickly the profession's transformation from a distribution-focus to a patient-focus will occur and what new roles pharmacists will need to assume as a result of this and other key trends impacting pharmacy, including the increasing influence of biotechnology and technology advances.

More pharmacists means more diverse roles

Recent research conducted by Jon Schommer, PhD, of the

University of Minnesota College of Pharmacy, for APhA's Career Evaluation Pathways Program for Pharmacy Professionals shows that pharmacists currently have many diverse career options with significantly different attributes, qualifications, and salaries. For the Pathways Program, about 5,000 pharmacists practicing in more than 16 settings were surveyed concerning the paths they took to pursue their career, what additional degrees and training they availed themselves of, and what they liked most and least about their chosen field. Results from more than 1,200



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respondents were encouraging in that they reflect that pharmacists have many choices throughout their professional careers and should not find themselves in proverbial dead-end jobs (see "APhA Career Pathways Evaluation Program," page 12). The growing societal need for pharmacists in expanding roles means there will be even more career choices in the future that may require further training or advance degrees.

To make themselves eligible for different career opportunities, pharmacists may need to obtain advance degrees or further training in the form of fellowships, residencies or certificate programs. Of pharmacists surveyed for the Pathways Program, 25% reported having advanced degrees. The number varied widely among respondents in different practice settings, with the highest being 100% for pharmaceutical scientists, followed by 78% for pharmacists in public policy/law, 44% for association managers, 38% for academics, 36% for pharmacists in industry, 27% for hospital pharmacy managers and government pharmacists, and 23% for clinical specialists. The most com-

mon advanced degrees reported were PhD, MBA, JD, MS, and MPH. The Pathways Program also compiled profiles containing detailed information on the type of advanced degrees and further training that those practicing in each career area have attained. These profiles may be useful resources as you consider whether pursuing an advanced degree is the right step for you. Go to www.pharmacist.com/careers.cfm for more on the Pathways Program and other career tools from APhA.

Pharmacy schools and colleges are beginning to offer students opportunities to earn advanced degrees at the same time as entry-level pharmacy degrees. These dual degree programs vary widely in terms of degrees offered, entrance requirements, structure, whether and by whom they are accredited, and additional costs beyond pharmacy tuition. Forty-three of the nation's 87 pharmacy schools and colleges will offer some form of dual degree programs during the 2003–2004 academic year, according to the American Association of Colleges of Pharmacy (AACP). The majority provide dual PharmD/PhD (23) programs, and several offer PharmD/MBA (22), PharmD/MS (11) and PharmD/JD (5) degrees, most in cooperation with other campus programs. Some, however, offer MS, PhD, and MBA degrees in conjunction with a nonlicensure-eligible pharmaceutical sciences degree, designed primarily for those pursuing research careers.

Why pursue a dual degree?

For many students, the decision to pursue a dual degree is centered on keeping all their options open, according to David Latif, PhD, PharmD/MBA director at the Shenandoah University Bernard J. Dunn School of Pharmacy. “Dual degrees can compliment the PharmD degree. Although the PharmD degree can get one in the door, the MBA gives the student an extra advantage in many settings that require management skills,” Latif said.

That thought is echoed by University of Arizona College of Pharmacy PharmD/MBA student Elizabeth Munch: “Business pervades every facet of health care, now more than ever. And an understanding of the business aspects of pharmacy is crucial no matter which aspect of pharmacy is considered. Business training will only serve to increase the competence and effectiveness of today's health care providers.”

James Lee, a PharmD/MS in regulatory science student at the University of Southern California School of Pharmacy (USC), said he chose to pursue a dual degree because the combination will give him the “credentials to explore opportunities congruent with or even outside of the pharmacy profession, including career options such as FDA or even investigational clinical trials.” Fellow USC PharmD/MBA student Jonathan Yamamoto said, “Not only will the degrees make you more marketable after graduation, they open the doors to many jobs in different areas of pharmacy normally unobtainable by most pharmacists.”

But beyond long-term career options, dual degree program students find advantages in their non-pharmacy degree classes, from expanding their thinking to networking with a wide variety of people from other fields. As Yamamoto noted, “Dual degrees are a great opportunity to double your education and

experiences during your time in pharmacy school. But even more important than the extra degree you'll earn are the life experiences and contacts you'll pick up along the way. The entire process will help build your knowledge, character, and, ultimately, shape your career.”

Programs vary widely

If you are interested in pursuing a dual degree, carefully research your options, since programs' structures and costs vary. AACP does not collect data on specific dual degree program structures, tuition, or enrollment at this time, but some researchers have conducted studies that are or will be published in the *American Journal for Pharmaceutical Education*.

One study published in the winter 2002 journal—“Dual PharmD/MBA Programs 2001–2002: A Descriptive Report,” by Amy Thai and JoLaine Draugalis—found the following: 79% of the MBA programs were accredited by the American Assembly of Collegiate Schools of Business; the majority offered courses at two locations: the pharmacy and business schools; courses are taken concurrently, rather than sequentially or interspersed in most programs; additional tuition for the MBA degree ranged from \$0 to \$28,333, depending on public or private institution; and joint degrees were awarded simultaneously.

Compared with students in a sole entry-level degree program, dual-degree students can expect to complete an additional year or more of school, with most advanced degree classes being held at night, on weekends, and during the summer. Again, differences among programs and degrees can be significant. Eric Mogalian, a PharmD/PhD student at the University of Arizona College of Pharmacy, was quick to point out, for example, that dual degree students must “get ready to work, and work a lot.” The reason, he stated, is the extra time commitments for projects that must be completed for graduate credit and research.

Doubling up saves time

One advantage to earning two degrees simultaneously is that several extra years in school are eliminated.

“The convenience of the program served as a motivating factor in my decision to register. I may earn a master's degree over the course of two summers, and still finish my current education at pharmacy school on time,” Lee said. He encourages all students to complete the degree requirements early because “the longer one waits, the busier that person will become.”

Yamamoto stated, “It can be very difficult to go back to school for an additional degree once you start working. I see so many of my colleagues right now trying to balance night classes with a full-time job and their kids—to get all of my education completed and out of the way at one time while I'm a full-time student anyway is great.”

Such convenience is a key factor why Shenandoah's dual PharmD/MBA has grown from 2 graduates in 2000 to 20 in 2002. “Students complete both degrees without an additional year in our program, and tuition costs are only \$6,000 more, making it a great value,” Latif said.

Things to consider regardless of which advanced degree you pursue include the entrance requirements for the advanced degrees. For example, many PharmD/MBA programs require the Graduate Management Admission Test (GMAT) exam. Also, are the advanced degree programs accredited by the recognized body in the respective fields, when are classes scheduled—nights, weekends, and summer—how much longer, if at all, will getting both degrees mean in terms of schooling, and what additional tuition will be required. Some answers can be found at individual pharmacy institution's Web sites.

How to do it without killing yourself

Time management and the ability to balance multiple demands are critical skills according to dual-degree program students. Ohio State University College of Pharmacy MS/Residency Program student Ryan Forrey stated, "I learned a lot about managing projects during my PharmD program because I was professionally involved in APhA-ASP and the International Federation of Pharmacy Students. I have to know and work toward deadlines."

Latif recommended all students, not just his dual-degree students, read Stephen Covey's *First Things First* to learn about

goal setting and prioritizing. Noted Latif: "Most students work, go to school, and many have families. The MBA is an added pressure. Students must be able to prioritize."

Does pursuing a dual degree strategy lessen the significance of either degree? The answer was a resounding "No" among students and faculty interviewed for this article.

As Yamamoto explained, "The education and experiences you receive with both degrees will benefit you regardless of the job you take. It's the overall package that you can deliver in your future job that people really care about. The journey that we take,

APhA Career Evaluation Pathways Program

In the late 1980s, Glaxo Pharmaceuticals (now Glaxo-SmithKline) launched the Pathway Evaluation Program for Pharmacy Professionals to help individuals in the pharmacy profession learn about various career options that might fit their interests and skills. The program featured trained faculty at each pharmacy school who facilitated student workshops using career profiles, critical success factor surveys, and other interactive tools to help participants match their interests against those available in the profession. The program's continued development, implementation, and dissemination was undertaken by APhA in 2001 as the Career Evaluation Pathways Program for Pharmacy Professionals. APhA is developing an interactive Web-based tool that students and practitioners will be able to use to match their career goals and priorities against the Career Pathways Program database, revealing the career paths most appropriate for them. Twenty career profiles have been developed, including:

- Academia
- Association Management
- Ambulatory Care
- Chain Community Pharmacy: Manager and Staff
- Compounding Pharmacy
- Government
- Home Health Care
- Hospital Pharmacy: Manager and Staff
- Independent Community Pharmacy: Manager and Staff
- Long-Term Care
- Managed Care Pharmacy: Benefit Designers and Staff
- Medical Communications/Drug Information
- Pharmacist Clinical Specialists
- Pharmaceutical Industry
- Pharmaceutical Scientist
- Public Policy/Law

To access program information, visit pharmacist.com's Career Center at www.pharmacist.com/careers.cfm.

Experts at your service

Interviewees for this article have graciously made themselves available to readers as resources on dual degree programs.

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