

Health fair provides forum for UAMS' advocacy



By Trey Crumby

Have you ever been frustrated with laws or regulations that govern pharmacy, partly because these laws and regulations are made by individuals who might reply, "I didn't know pharmacists could do that" if you were to tell them of the services pharmacists are qualified to perform? I'm sure the answer is yes. So what better way to educate the public, especially those who make the laws, than to tell them about what we can do and to show and provide those services to them? That was exactly the thinking behind the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences (UAMS) APhA-ASP chapter's first Legislative Health Fair in February 2003.

At APhA2004 in Seattle, my chapter received the APhA-ASP Policy and Legislative Award for the 2002-2003 reporting cycle. This was a great honor because it marked the third time we had received the award in the 5 years it had been given. There is no doubt that the Legislative Health Fair was the highlight of our policy and legislative activities for that year. Our chapter also put together an impressive array of policy and legislative programming.

Teaming up with other pharmacists

The Legislative Health Fair was the brainchild of then-chapter president John Vinson, who knew that if the event was going to be successful, student members could not do it alone. He, along with the executive committee and chapter advisor, quickly enlisted the help of faculty and the Arkansas Pharmacists Association (APA). Preliminary meetings were held between all parties involved, and it was decided that the health fair would be held in conjunction with the APA Legislative Day, when pharmacists from around the state come to the capitol to lobby state legislators. In order for our services to be highly visible to the public, we reserved the Capitol Rotunda, the center of activity.

Next, faculty were recruited to assist in the areas in which they specialized including diabetes, lipid management, drug information, bone mineral density, hypertension, and immunizations. Student pharmacists from the chapter volunteered to work different shifts in various screening areas, which gave them a chance to sharpen their pharmaceutical care skills and an opportunity to interact with state legislators, legislative staff, and members of the general public. While at the capitol, students screened hundreds of patients and spoke with them about the important role their pharmacist should play in their health care.

In addition to providing health screenings, students attended the APA Legislative Day luncheon and legislative reception, where they were able to learn more about issues that could potentially impact pharmacy in Arkansas. Chapter members also had the opportunity to visit with pharmacists and state legislators from



UAMS student Erin Wandrey screens a capitol employee for diabetes at the 2005 APhA-ASP Arkansas Legislative Health Fair.

their communities to discuss legislation that was before the General Assembly. These discussions reinforced the importance of political advocacy and gave participating students valuable real-world experience.

How to get started

By now I hope that you, too, think the Legislative Health Fair was a pretty good idea. How do you plan such an event? Here are a few pointers.

- Know the calendar for your state legislature, as well as the rules and regulations for your state capitol. (Some states prohibit any type of free service to be provided on capitol grounds.)
- Contact your state pharmacist association(s) to see if they would be interested in collaborating.
- Recruit students and faculty; make it an event for the entire college.
- Find out about the hot issues in your state and educate chapter members accordingly.
- Provide chapter members with information about state legislators from their hometowns and have those students seek their representatives out during the event.
- Try to get press/publicity at the event.

The bottom line is that the profession of pharmacy is constantly changing, and student pharmacists must begin advocating for pharmacy now. Constant action is required to stay ahead of the curve. The UAMS chapter's Legislative Health Fair allows us to do just that. The second legislative health fair was held this past February, and it was an even bigger success than the first. Actions speak louder than words. When you put them together, however, they become all the more powerful.

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