U.S. Pharmacoeconomic Fellowship Programs

In the U.S., a number of educational programs have recently been developed to meet the emerging need for experts and professionals who are capable of conducting, interpreting, and using health economic evaluations for health care decision-making. Among the diverse types of educational offerings, pharmacoeconomic and outcomes research (PE/OR) fellowship programs have become one of the most prominent types of training curricula.1

Recently, the Fellowship Task Force of the International Society of Pharmacoeconomics and Outcomes Research (ISPOR) conducted a study aimed at increasing the understanding of the organizational structures and educational components of PE/OR fellowship programs.2 The opinions of current and past fellows regarding the characteristics of these programs were solicited using a Web-based survey questionnaire administered via the ISPOR Web site. Of a total of 102 fellows who completed the questionnaire, 71 met the inclusion criteria and were incorporated into the analysis.

According to fellows’ responses, there were many similarities among the programs in terms of their general characteristics and organizational and educational aspects (Table 1). PE/OR fellowships were usually two years in length, sponsored by the pharmaceutical industry, and conducted primarily in academic and pharmaceutical industry sites. The fellows reported that their PE/OR fellowships provided them with adequate facilities and resources to conduct research in the field. Regarding the educational components, the fellows stated that the programs provided them with a variety of research skills and offered exposure to a wide range of research methodologies, which increased their knowledge of PE/OR.

As an initiative of the ISPOR Fellowship Task Force, this study increases our knowledge about the current state of PE/OR fellowship programs in the U.S. The results of this study may have several practical applications:

1. Organizations with established PE/OR fellowships may use this information to improve their programs.
2. Institutions wishing to begin a PE/OR fellowship may utilize these findings as a framework to develop their program curricula.
3. More important, these data may foster increased knowledge about these fellowship programs among pharmacy students and graduates interested in gaining expertise in the PE/OR field and in furthering their professional careers.
4. Finally, the study’s findings may help to expand existing information in regard to the extent to which current programs adhere to the 1999 American College of Clinical Pharmacy (ACCP) guideline for PE/OR fellowships.3

Readers who are interested in the findings should consult the Maio study cited in Reference 2.

References

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Table 1 Common Profile of a U.S.-Based Pharmacoeconomic Fellowship Program According to Fellows’ Responses*

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<th>Organizational Features</th>
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<td>Two-year program</td>
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<td>Sponsored by pharmaceutical industry</td>
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<td>Conducted primarily in academic and pharmaceutical industry sites</td>
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<td>Available facilities: including medical library, computer center, and medical database</td>
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<td>Average fellow’s salary ($U.S.): $30,000–$40,000 (year 2001)</td>
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<th>Educational Features</th>
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<tr>
<td>Skills taught: including economic analysis and methodologies as well as research design and methods</td>
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<td>Software applications: including SAS and Microsoft Access</td>
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<td>Exposure to PE/OR design and analysis</td>
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<td>Research skills: conceptualization, operationalization, data management, and application of research projects</td>
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PE/OR = pharmacoeconomic and outcomes research;
SAS = statistical package software, SAS Institute, Cary, NC.