

## Training Pharmacists for Today—Not Yesterday

Approximately 10 years ago, the National Pharmaceutical Council and the Student American Pharmaceutical Association established a cooperative activity known as the Pharmaceutical Industry Summer Internship Program.

From its inception, the program has flourished; it has been well-supported by various major drug companies, and each year the number of student applicants has exceeded the total positions annually available. To date, about 1,000 students have had an opportunity to participate in the program.

In theory, the program sounded as if it would be a terrific learning experience. As described, the student would have a meaningful opportunity to add to that student's overall knowledge of pharmacy, with emphasis on its industrial aspects. Training would be offered within the industry setting which would supplement that received in traditional types of pharmacy practice.

But cynics had their doubts. All too often in the past, pharmacists have been taken in by the industry. Beneath the attractive surface glitter of other drug industry programs or projects, there have been too many instances of an ulterior motive.

Consequently, many pharmacy leaders suspected that the NPC-SAPhA Summer Internship Program would turn out in actuality to be either: (a) a clever way to get cheap help as laboratory glassware washers or for other routine "floor sweeper" type jobs; or (b) an ingenious scheme to "brainwash" selected student leaders regarding the industry's position on various pharmaceutically related policy matters or political issues.

But it didn't turn out that way at all! In fact, all the students, with whom we have talked after they participated in the program, have enthusiastically related how much they learned, how they were given exposure to a broad spectrum of industry operations, and how much immediate attention and instruction they received from the highly committed and well-qualified professionals who served as their preceptors.

The typical industry program is of about 12-weeks duration on a full-time basis; this is equivalent to about one-fourth of the one-year pharmacy internship required by most states. Generally, the internship is of a broad general nature, with the student spending the entire summer at a single drug company, but with rotating assignments in several different departments or divisions, such as quality control, marketing, manufacturing, formulation development, and so on. All those assigned any responsibility for the interns emphasize learning over productivity and, by training, they usually are pharmacists themselves.

The program did not turn out this well by pure accident. The NPC wisely drew up a document entitled "Guidelines for Pharmaceutical Industry Internships" which gives direction to each individual company in operating its respective program in a way that will provide reasonable uniformity and consistency from one firm to another. Furthermore, to its credit, the NPC has consistently shown good judgment in organizing and operating the program. For example, when initially established, considerable constructive input was provided by the SAPhA leadership, and ever since its inception, the entire program has been regularly monitored by a joint NPC-SAPhA committee.

In light of the beneficial nature of this internship learning experience, efforts have been made to get individual state boards of pharmacy to award credit for participation in such programs. This credit—to a maximum of 500 hours of the total 1,500 hours typically specified—would partially fulfill the experimental training requirements of state boards of pharmacy as one of the requisites for pharmacy licensure. To date, some 32 state boards of pharmacy either will allow, or will consider, various amounts of time in nontraditional practice experience as counting toward the total internship requirement.

Regrettably, however, the remaining states have refused to give credit for participation in either the NPC-SAPhA industry program, or for various other equally commendable, nontraditional practice experiences. The latter include the Veterans Administration Hospital Pharmacy Undergraduate Training Programs, the U.S. Public Health Service COSTEP Training Program, national or state pharmaceutical association internships, or a host of other programs conducted under the auspices of colleges, governmental agencies, or drug companies.

Both the SAPhA House of Delegates and the National Association of Boards of Pharmacy adopted resolutions at their 1981 Annual Meetings calling on individual state pharmacy boards to recognize and credit nontraditional practice experience. Recognition and credit would be conditioned upon a determination that a particular program met established criteria including preceptor orientation and written reports.

At its recently concluded 1982 Annual Meeting, the APPhA House of Delegates considered the adoption of a similar policy position for the Association.

Hopefully, the 20 reluctant boards of pharmacy will give due consideration to this matter. Pharmacy today is not practiced as it was 50 years ago; as a result, it makes little sense that the only practice experience that will be accepted toward licensure should be exclusively oriented toward the way pharmacy was practiced in 1932 rather than in 1982.

—EDWARD G. FELDMANN  
American Pharmaceutical Association  
Washington, DC 20037