

ACPE: Education's Measuring Stick

American drug products have long been regarded as meeting a level of quality and excellence generally unsurpassed throughout the world. In turn, the reasons often attributed to this phenomenon—in addition to the obvious capabilities and performance of the drug industry itself—are the elements of effective standards establishment and effective standards enforcement. In other words, the track record of drug quality is due, in large measure, to the impact or contribution made by the official compendia (*i.e.*, the USP/NF) and by the federal Food and Drug Administration.

Similarly, the graduates of American pharmacy schools have also been highly regarded worldwide as being uniformly well grounded in the art and science of the profession they have chosen. And, as in the case of American drug products, such consistency of quality and overall level of excellence is no accident.

Pharmacy education in the United States is blessed with a competent, effective, and efficient body that sets standards and accredits professional programs of the colleges and schools of pharmacy as well as the providers of continuing pharmaceutical education. The group responsible for these activities is the American Council on Pharmaceutical Education.

This national agency is not a government body. As in the case of the USP/NF, the ACPE represents the volunteer effort of the private sector to meet a perceived need and to establish a suitable level of performance that will give both the public and the health care community reasonable assurance of the quality of the products involved—in the former case high-quality pharmaceuticals and in the latter case high-quality pharmacy practitioners.

The Council is sponsored by three national groups in pharmacy: The American Association of Colleges of Pharmacy to represent academia and pharmacy educators; the American Pharmaceutical Association to represent the pharmacy profession and its practitioners; and the National Association of Boards of Pharmacy to represent governmental bodies responsible for the examination and licensure of pharmacy practitioners. Each of these three groups appoints three individual representatives to sit on the Council.

In addition, the public interest is represented on the ACPE through the participation of the American Council

on Education, and that body appoints the tenth member to serve on the Council.

The ACPE is served by a very small but competent staff operating on a rather meager annual budget. This constitutes a dramatic illustration that big is not necessarily better, that empire building may not be beneficial for a particular agency, and that a key virtue of a lean operation often is maximum efficiency through minimum red tape.

Indeed, despite its very limited staff and resources, the ACPE has been very active in evaluating the professional degree programs of colleges and schools of pharmacy. Such evaluations and accreditations are made against standards of curriculum, of facilities, of staff, and of related considerations which the Council has developed and instituted over the years.

Similarly, evaluations are made of the providers of continuing pharmaceutical education, again judging such providers and their programs against criteria developed and adopted by the ACPE. Furthermore, the standards or criteria utilized are not static: they regularly undergo review and revision to ensure that they are meeting contemporary needs of the profession and of the public.

Our reason for choosing this particular time to comment on the ACPE and its work is due to the fact that the agency just celebrated its 50th Anniversary since its founding on August 26, 1932, by the above named sponsoring organizations.

Unquestionably, the ACPE has served well both pharmacy and the public. The uniformly high quality of the American network of higher education in pharmacy is a clear testimonial to that fact.

We take this opportunity to salute the Council, its members, its staff, its sponsors, and all those who now have, or who formerly had, a role in its successful operation. Its composition, structure, and operation make it unique among the accrediting agencies for the professions. Moreover, from our personal observation, it also appears to us to be the best and the most credible such accrediting agency.

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