Diversity Considerations in Selecting a Residency Program

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UNDERSTANDING DIVERSITY AND ITS PHARMACY APPLICATIONS

Defining the essential factors (e.g., diversity, location, specialties) that will guide your selection of programs to apply to can be a daunting process. Residency programs describe a variety of these factors on their websites and through printed handouts to aid in the selection process. However, some factors are not as easily characterized by summary statements. Diversity is one such factor that can have a lasting impact on your training experience within a residency program and on your personal and professional development. Your final decision for pharmacy residency programs will involve diversity in some way, whether or not you directly realize it.

Diversity is perhaps one of the most pervasive concepts in our society, with applications to virtually every aspect of the human experience. Simply put, diversity refers to variety.1,2 Diversity
is a group of individuals in one social system who have distinctly different and socially-relevant group affiliations, which include gender and sexuality, nationality, age, religion, race and ethnicity, physiological abilities/disabilities, disciplines/fields, and research experiences. As such, it’s no wonder that we can apply this concept to so many areas of life. Although diversity is an innate feature of humanity, embracing and encouraging diversity in its many forms is not always innate and oftentimes needs to be fostered. It has been shown that lack of exposure to diversity—among patient populations and healthcare professionals—is actually detrimental to the development of professionalism in pharmacy trainees.

Not surprisingly, diversity affects the pharmacy profession, from education to clinical practice. The 2016 Accreditation Council for Pharmacy Education (ACPE) standards require that pharmacy programs actively incorporate diversity goals into their programmatic learning outcomes, in an effort to produce graduates who will be able to successfully identify, correct, and minimize health disparities in the population. It is also expected that pharmacy curricula incorporate a breadth of didactic modalities that suit the needs of diverse learners and will prepare students to function as contributing members of interprofessional teams in the didactic and experiential setting. A recently published review identified several barriers to promoting a culture of diversity within academic pharmacy settings, including exclusion of diversity as an institutional core value, attitudes of resistance to change, legal restrictions from using race/ethnicity as admissions and recruitment variables, and lack of sufficient financial and human resources to execute change.

Program diversity not only provides exposure to patients from varying backgrounds but also impacts your personal and professional experience during the residency year.

The pervasiveness of this concept, even within the microcosm of pharmacy, made our initial brainstorming process for this chapter both very productive and very difficult. In comparing our two very different paths to where we are today, we amassed two sets of experiences in exploring diversity in pharmacy practice. As was the case for us both, elements of diversity are likely, in one way or another, to affect your decision to pursue those postgraduate pharmacy training programs best aligned with your goals. Often, you may not even realize that you’re deliberating on a diversity-related aspect when ranking programs. It is because of the ubiquitous nature of diversity that it deserves recognition in your path to finding your best-fit pharmacy residency program.

Program Composition Diversity

One of the first factors that residency applicants inquire about potential programs is how many positions they offer for either postgraduate year-1