

Perceived benefits of a non-traditional post-PharmD fellowship

Abstract

Post-PharmD fellowships have evolved much over the years. While initially the term was used to describe a program aimed at training an independent researcher, it now is commonly used to describe graduate training for those who wish to pursue a career in the pharmaceutical industry as well. Even further, non-traditional post-PharmD fellowships may prepare pharmacy graduates for other areas of interest and expertise outside of bench research or the pharmaceutical industry in areas based on outcomes data, health economics, or clinical specialties. Prior to graduation, students are presented with many post-graduate opportunities – joining the workforce in various areas, continuing their education with a dual degree, or pursuing post-graduate training options such as residency or fellowship. While the fellowship opportunities and benefits leading to independent research or pharmaceutical industry are widely known, the non-traditional post-PharmD fellowships are less commonly discussed or presented.

Keywords: pharmacy, non-traditional, residency, fellowship, graduate training

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Introduction

Upon graduation with a Doctor of Pharmacy (PharmD) degree, graduates have a multitude of opportunities. While the majority of PharmD graduates (53%) choose to enter community pharmacy pathways, more students are exploring alternative routes.¹ Of these routes, pursuit of post-doctoral fellowships in industry have steadily increased and are designed to expose pharmacy graduates to areas of interest within industry such as medical affairs, clinical development, or regulatory affairs.² With the increasing availability of fellowships in industry functional areas, other non-traditional fellowships are also becoming available. These opportunities have a variety of focus and allow trainees to explore pathways related to clinical research, precision medicine, or pharmaceutical outcomes to name a few.

The most widely known route of obtaining a specialized position within pharmacy is through the completion of a postgraduate year-1 (PGY-1) pharmacy residency followed by an additional level of specialization in a certain disease state or acuity, defined as postgraduate year-2 (PGY-2) training. For pharmacists seeking specialization outside of a traditional pharmacy residency program, additional postdoctoral training could include fellowships focused on niche areas of expertise. Postdoctoral pharmacy fellowships have been broadly broken into two distinct categories. In postdoctoral academic pharmacy fellowships, fellows can become independent researchers with career options including becoming a principal investigator of clinical studies or a collaborative researcher. Postdoctoral industry fellowships prepare fellows for a career in biopharmaceutical or pharmaceutical industries where specialization lies within the functional area chosen upon the individual.³ Other non-traditional fellowships may be community-based, health equity focused, or real-world evidence driven programs that allow postgraduate pharmacists to immerse themselves in roles best suited for their career goals.

Non-traditional fellowships, or fellowships without a direct industry focus, provide additional interdisciplinary opportunities depending on where they are located and what their focus is on. One potential benefit is the diverse training experiences available which may include time spent in an associated clinical practice, health system operations, and time for independent research. Project management, communication skills, and networking strategies may

be emphasized heavily in these types of programs, all of which are necessary attributes to be successful in management, consulting, or policy roles. The non-traditional fellowship may also offer a trainee with direct experience in practical, real-world problem solving through educational opportunities in managing budgets, implementing quality initiatives in clinical practice, or taking part in designing clinical protocols.

Another benefit of completing a non-traditional post-doctoral fellowship program is the ability to freely pursue a variety of training certificates that directly align with the individual fellow's area of interest or career goals. For example, the American Society of Health-System Pharmacists (ASHP) offers a wide variety of professional certificates focused on career development, including but not limited to specialty pharmacy, pharmacokinetics, oncology, research skills, weight management, teaching, and pharmacogenomics.⁴ Though these experiences are freely available to all post-doctoral trainees, a nationally recognized training certificate can show that the fellow has multidisciplinary experience, which can in turn make them more competitive for leadership positions or specialized roles.

A non-traditional post-doctoral training position may lead to a broader and more impactful professional network. These are opportunities to connect with industry leaders, product managers, investors, policymakers, or health system leaders that trainees might not get otherwise in a more traditional role. This offers a unique networking opportunity for trainees to form and build relationships with potential future employers. In addition to creating a vast network, the non-traditional fellowships offer flexibility to pursue projects with stakeholders and individual interests. Because of these unique partnerships, fellows may have better job prospects post-training, whether it be an offer from the host organization or having strong referrals elsewhere.

Conclusion

Advantages of non-traditional fellowship experiences may enhance a fellow's portfolio for potential recruitment into the workforce in their area of interest and expertise. With a wide array of experiences, diverse training sites, an array of available specialties, concurrent certificates, and potential focus on networking, non-traditional fellowships have the potential to equip a pharmacy graduate with training to match

many pharmacist opportunities. It is our opinion that involvement and completion of a non-traditional fellowship after graduation from a pharmacy program will pave the way for a pharmacist to pursue any area of interest.

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Conflict of interest

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