Introduction

- Professional identity is how a person perceives (in terms of their role, focus, and responsibilities): (1) themselves, and (2) how others perceive them.1
- The formation of a clear professional identity enables students to better transition from school to work, motivates new pharmacists, and creates confidence in a newfound role.2
- There is poor consensus of pharmacists’ professional identity.2
- Past studies have identified professional identities of pharmacists located in the United Kingdom.1
- However, it is unknown whether the same attributes for practicing-pharmacists align with student pharmacists located in different geographical locations.

Objectives

1. To determine the predominant professional identities and compare differences between cohorts in student pharmacists at the University of Arizona College of Pharmacy.
2. To examine correlations between pharmacy practice experiences and professional identity development among student pharmacist cohorts at the University of Arizona College of Pharmacy.

Methods

- Students were eligible to participate in this cross-sectional study if they were currently enrolled as full-time student pharmacists at the University of Arizona College of Pharmacy.
- Data were collected using an online questionnaire created in REDCap that incorporated the professional identities established from Eleye et al.1
- The questionnaire consisted of 20 items to assess level of agreement with professional identity preferences using a six-point Likert scale.
- Data were compared using descriptive statistics and the Kruskal Wallis test. The a priori alpha value was 0.05.

Results

- A total of 118 student pharmacists from all four cohort years (25% response rate from the 477 PharmD students currently enrolled) at the University of Arizona College of Pharmacy completed the questionnaire.
- Participants were predominantly female (73%), Caucasian (43%), and had obtained a bachelor’s degree (58%).
- The proportion of gender, ethnicity, and highest level of education was similar across cohort years (p>0.05).
- No difference was found between level of agreement with professional identity and student pharmacist cohort year.
- The majority of student pharmacists reported they strongly agree with the professional identities: “Medicine Adviser” (43%) and “Medicine Supplier” (43%).
- “Medicine Adviser” was the most frequently endorsed predominant professional identity (37%); however, student pharmacists primarily described their role models as “Clinical Practitioner” (38%).

Figure 1. Level of Agreement with professional identities (n= 118)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Professional Identity</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Somewhat Agree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Scientist</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medicine adviser</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clinical practitioner</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social carer</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medicine maker</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medicine supplier</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leader</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business person</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unremarkable character</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entrepreneur</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0.15</td>
<td>0.15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Discussion

- This study found that student pharmacists’ perceptions of their professional identity did not differ between cohort years. Given the unclear professional identity of the pharmacy profession, this suggests additional professional identity training may be warranted.
- The most frequently endorsed professional identities found in this study differ to those previously found by Elvey et al.; this supports the professional identity dissonance of pharmacists and suggests pharmacists professional identity may differ based on geographical location.
- Future research could involve focus groups to examine student pharmacists’ reasons for choosing their predominant professional identities, and to assess differences between cohort years.
- Study limitations include those intrinsic to survey designs such as the possibility of inaccurate or unreliable data. The response rate of 25% indicates some response bias, and the study findings are only generalizable to student pharmacists at the University of Arizona.

Conclusions

- Professional identity preferences of student pharmacists did not differ between cohorts, warranting additional formal training to facilitate professional identity formation.

References


Conflict of Interest

Dr. Axon reports grant funding from the American Association of Colleges of Pharmacy, Arizona Department of Health, Merck & Co., Pharmacy Quality Alliance, and Tabula Rasa Op-Co, outside of this study. The other authors have no conflicts of interest to disclose.