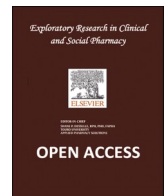




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Bridging generations: The central role of career-stage mentorship in social and administrative pharmacy

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ABSTRACT

Mentorship plays a central role in the professional development of practitioners across a vast range of disciplines. Social and administrative pharmacy is no different. Yet, in this field, the practice of experienced practitioners passing on their knowledge and skills to those new to the profession, known as career-stage mentorship, is in decline. This editorial examines why this is happening, what it means for social and administrative pharmacy, and how this valuable practice can be restored.

1. Introduction

Research shows that mentorships provide mentees with psychosocial support and play a central role in enhancing their career success.^{1–3} The purpose of a mentorship is for the mentor to use the expertise they have gained over their career to supplement the skills and experience of the mentee. This involves acknowledging the mentee's strengths and, by establishing a trusting relationship, nurturing the development and growth of the mentee.⁴

Institutional mentoring offers numerous benefits, including improved job satisfaction, higher retention rates, and enhanced professional development. Mentees gain insights from seasoned professionals that are typically not covered in formal education. This support bridges the gap between academic knowledge and real-world application, facilitating a smoother transition into professional roles. Additionally, mentoring fosters a sense of community and connection within the organization, which can boost overall job satisfaction and reduce attrition rates.

However, mentorship programs also face challenges. These include time constraints for mentors, the risk of mismatched mentor-mentee pairings, and the lack of formal recognition for mentorship efforts. Moreover, poorly designed mentorship programs can become ineffective, leading to frustration for both mentors and mentees.

In social and administrative pharmacy, the professional development of new pharmacists has traditionally relied heavily on career-stage mentorship. This form of mentorship describes the practice of veteran pharmacists providing guidance and support to less-experienced colleagues. In the past, it has been a vital part of ensuring that newcomers develop the professionalism, skills and knowledge they need to succeed in their careers. Sadly, career-stage mentorship in social and administrative pharmacy is declining and this decline is having substantial knock-on effects.^{5,6} Recent studies have shown a concerning decline in mentoring within social and administrative pharmacies. Crumby's

research highlights the negative impact on professional growth and retention rates due to this decline in mentorship practices in pharmacy education.⁷ Institutionalized mentorship programs, despite their effectiveness, are becoming less prevalent due to institutional constraints and shifting priorities.⁸ Although mentorship offers substantial benefits for social and academic integration, pharmacy settings do not fully utilize these programs, missing opportunities to improve student outcomes.⁹ Draugalis et al. explore the historical significance of mentorship in academic pharmacy and its recent decline due to changing faculty roles and budget constraints.¹⁰ A Rhodes University analysis emphasizes the importance of mentoring for both academic and psychosocial development, noting how a lack of mentorship can hinder students' overall growth.¹¹

Effective mentoring significantly impacts the pharmacy profession by helping develop well-rounded individuals capable of managing job demands. Mentoring facilitates the exchange of tacit knowledge, which is essential for upholding professional ethics and standards of practice. It also encourages the development of leadership skills, motivating mentees to pursue higher positions in the industry and thereby advancing the field.

Strengthening mentoring programs in social and administrative pharmacy is crucial for maintaining the profession's viability, developing future leaders, and enhancing professional competency. Institutions can foster a robust mentorship culture by addressing the benefits and challenges of mentoring and implementing solutions to overcome these obstacles.

In response to this troubling trend, this editorial will explore the reduction in career-stage mentorship in social and administrative pharmacy and will recommend ways to revive this much-needed practice.

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2. Career-stage mentorship: a pivotal step to success

When social and administrative pharmacy graduates enter the professional world, there is often a significant gap between the knowledge and skills they have learned in class and their real-world applications. The following issues highlight a significant gap between the knowledge and skills learned in class and their real-world applications:

2.1. Inability to apply clinical knowledge by pharmacists

One of the most essential skills that must be developed to a greater extent is clinical knowledge. Pharmacists must know pharmacotherapy, pharmacokinetics, and drug interaction to do the best for the patient. Nevertheless, failure to close knowledge gaps can be costly to clinical practice. For instance, a pharmacist who has yet to take their time to learn about drug interactions may prescribe a particular drug that, when taken together with another drug, may have undesirable side effects.¹² In the same way, providing wrong information regarding dosing may result in therapy failure or toxicity that would affect patients' status immediately. These clinical knowledge lacunas involve the individual patient and larger healthcare delivery systems, like readmissions and overall costs.

Therefore, Mentorship is considered central to narrowing down these clinical knowledge deficits. Using experience-based guidance, peer pharmacists with seniority can help junior colleagues solve similar problems in their career paths. For example, pharmacotherapy mentorship practices include the facilitation of case-based discussions with simulation wherein the mentor guides the mentee through realistic clinical cases that illustrate the subtleties of pharmacotherapy decision-making. Furthermore, shadowing enables the mentee to physically follow and be guided by a practicing pharmacist to come to a practical experience of how such knowledge is applied. According to Seston et al. this type of supervision leads pharmacists to gain confidence and competence when making sound clinical judgments that benefit patient care in the long run.¹³

2.2. Poor communication skills among pharmacists

According to Sim et al. Pharmacy practice heavily relies on effective communication, including patient information exchange, interprofessional practice, and community health engagements.¹⁴ However, the field of communication skills is sometimes neglected in the academic curriculum, and as such, there are apparent voids when these individuals join the working world. Lack of communication confuses, clients do not adhere to the prescribed medications, and there is a threat to their health. For instance, if a pharmacist needs to properly communicate with the patient regarding a medication regimen, there is a potential that the patient might administer the drug inappropriately and suffer from therapeutic failure or side effects. According to Kwame & Petrucka, 2020 lack of effective communication with other healthcare professionals can lead to misunderstanding, adverse outcomes, prolonged time for diagnosis and management, and tension in working relations.¹⁵

Mentorship is instrumental in enhancing communication skills because it equips pharmacists with the necessary communication skills. Mentorship can involve teaching models whereby pharmacists can practice their communication strategies using models in minimal patient interaction settings that mimic real life. Mentors can also give the mentees feedback about how they can present information better. Furthermore, interfacing with different communication situations, like attending interdisciplinary team meetings, enables pharmacists to comprehend the various communication requirements and anticipations within a healthcare team.¹⁶ With the encouragement of practical verbal communication skills, the Mentorship also develops better collaboration between pharmacists and healthcare team members, resulting in improved patient-centered care.

2.3. Poor pharmaceutical calculation skills

Pharmaceutical calculations are essential to the practical nursing and pharmacy applications of medication use and involve dosage calculations, compounding, and medication preparation. Pharmaceutical calculations are very sensitive; a small mistake means the patient will receive a low dose, a high dose, or an incorrect formulation altogether, causing harm to the patient.¹⁷ For instance, if there is an error in preparing a pediatric dosage form, one can end up administering the wrong dosage that is lethal to the child. As with compounded sterile preparations, errors can occur throughout the compounding process, which could render the medication unsafe and ineffective for the patient.

Mentorship helps bridge calculation gaps through well-scheduled training sessions where pharmacists exercise pharmaceutical calculations with proper guidance. They include actual problem-solving scenarios with frequent feedback, enabling the mentee to rectify their shortcomings. By doing so, pharmacists improve the mathematical calculations and, therefore, the overall patient safety and the quality of the pharmacy care service.

2.4. Impact on public health

Pharmacists are considered important members of the interdisciplinary teams of public health programs involving immunization campaigns, health promotion activities, and disease prevention strategies.¹⁸ This makes their participation vital in these interventions because they are usually the most available and easily accessible caregivers in the community. Nonetheless, these efforts can be hampered by poor skills and knowledge of public health. For instance, inadequate or insufficient training may prevent a pharmacist from administering vaccines as required, which can, in turn, reduce the rate of vaccinations within the population, contrary to the public health agenda.¹⁹ Likewise, suppose a pharmacist needs to gain adequate knowledge in administering health screenings. In that case, they may be unable to identify early indicators of diseases and illnesses, resulting in late detection and treatment.

Career-stage Mentorship increases pharmacists' public health skills by providing targeted education and experiences in public health with experienced supervisors.²⁰ These mentors include information on the structure and implementation of the programs and patients' education and involving them. It also sets the tone for managing communities in terms of health. It provides pharmacists with positive encouragement and outlook to go out and be leaders in the health of their community. It doubles up as an instance of enhancing their professional accomplishment and community health status.

2.5. Healthcare system efficiency

The improved competence of pharmacists is essential to the effectiveness of the health care delivery system. This is because pharmacists with adequate knowledge and skills will be in a position to assist other healthcare providers, avoid cases of medication errors, and enhance the care of the patient. However, that puts them in a position where knowledge/skill gaps within the pharmacists negatively affect the healthcare system. For instance, if a pharmacist fails to evaluate a patient's medication management plan appropriately, they may lead to extra consultations, tests, or hospitalizations.²¹ This leads to imposing extra work on other healthcare team members and escalating the cost of the overall healthcare provision.

Mentorship improves the efficiency of the healthcare system since pharmacists are equipped with tools to plan work, organize tasks, and cooperate.²² Concentrated outcomes enhance operations and efficiency and decrease medical mistakes and system bottlenecks to improve healthcare quality. Moreover, through regular learning and development, Mentorship ensures that pharmacists are always up-to-date with the current practices and innovations, enhancing their impact toward improving system productivity.

2.6. Inter-professional relationships

Good working relationships between specialties are essential to provide well-coordinated and holistic care to patients. Interprofessional relations and trust between medical professionals are critical to ensure patients are offered the best care.²³ However, gaps in knowledge and skills among pharmacists can compromise these relations and result in such issues as rivalry, misunderstanding, and lack of cooperation. For example, suppose a pharmacist must gain clinical knowledge to engage in productive conversations with physicians or other healthcare providers. In that case, this may cause frustration and communication barriers, thus influencing patient outcomes. Mentorship relationships can also enhance inter-professional practice for health and social care students through enhancing respect and cooperation. The benefits of acquiring knowledge through a mentor include recognizing how a pharmacist can perform as a team member with other healthcare workers and their views.²⁴ Some possible interests that can be created through mentorship initiatives include Interdisciplinary case conferences and team-based care models. Therefore, besides positively impacting inter-professional relationships, pharmacists' role in providing Mentorship to other healthcare professionals strengthens patient care.

Therefore, it is crucial to link pharmacists to mentors based on their stage in practice because they may need more knowledge and skills to provide quality care. Due to guidance and support specific to an individual's needs, pharmacists are equipped with clinical knowledge, communication skills, pharmaceutical calculations, and public health competence for the required positions. Moreover, extended faculty development also contributes to improved relationships with other medical professionals, the healthcare system's increased productivity, better results for patients, and the improvement of public health programs.

With pharmacists increasingly being called upon to do more in terms of patient care than ever before, more effective mentorship programs will be needed. Therefore, through disposable career stage mentorship, healthcare institutions and pharmacist organizations can ensure that pharmacists are well-positioned to address the contemporary healthcare agenda in order to enhance operational efficiency, quality delivery, and access to healthcare services. This investment in Mentorship is not only a service that enhances the professional growth of pharmacists but also a necessity to address the general problem related to the quality and availability of healthcare services.

Much of the research shows that people who have experienced mentorship are motivated to mentor others and continue the exchange of knowledge and skills.²⁵⁻²⁹ Other studies reveal that graduates who are mentored have a greater sense of wellbeing and are inspired to learn and pursue their goals.³⁰

2.6.1. Why is career-stage mentorship declining?

The literature identifies three key factors that are driving the reduction of career-stage mentorship in the field of social and administrative pharmacy. First, contemporary pharmacists face higher workloads and thus greater time constraints. These time pressures are preventing them from engaging in mentorship responsibilities.³¹

Second, there are technological barriers to career-stage mentorship in social and administrative pharmacy. At present, pharmacy practice is quickly integrating technological tools that can create a barrier between older and newer pharmacists, with the younger generation more comfortable using digital tools and older pharmacists relying more on traditional approaches.³²

Finally, traditional mentorship activities are being undermined by changes in professional dynamics. As social and administrative pharmacy continues to move toward clinical positions and specialization, there are fewer opportunities for conventional mentorship.³³

2.6.2. What does this decline mean for the profession?

A reduction in career-stage mentorship has the potential to have wide-ranging effects on the discipline of social and administrative pharmacy. Specifically, it may result in the loss of valuable experiential, tacit knowledge, leading to a corresponding decline in pharmacists' professional development and patient care.³⁴ Additionally, low levels of mentorship can result in little professional continuity where the professional pharmacist community is no longer connected, leading to the isolation of different generations of practitioners.³⁵ Finally, mentorship is associated with higher retention rates and increased job satisfaction, meaning that a reduction in mentorship may also see these metrics decline. This could then worsen the workforce challenges facing the industry.³⁶

2.6.3. What can be done to save career-stage mentorship?

Several steps that can be taken at different levels to revive career-stage mentorship in social and administrative pharmacy. On the institutional level, pharmacy institutions and organizations should provide formal recognition of mentorship and nurture its uptake by providing the required resources, including time.³⁷

Importantly, a mentorship's success is defined not only by the performance of the mentee but also by the mentor's performance and the quality of the mentor-mentee relationship. Moreover, experiential skills should form the foundation of the assessment of mentorship learning outcomes as experiential skills are vital to ensuring that mentees have the competencies required for effective pharmacy practice. Research has found that the most important learning outcomes in experiential training are self-awareness, self-development, and self-assessment skills, findings that support the professional development competency frameworks provided by the AACP, ACCP, and ASHP.³⁸

On the technological level, it is worth acknowledging that while technology can be a stumbling block, it can also be a springboard. Mentorship programs should leverage technology by using online platforms to introduce virtual mentorships to enable mentees and mentors in different geographical locations to connect.³²

On the professional and personal level, successful mentorship experiences should be celebrated and a culture promoting mentorship should be established. By creating a professional culture that values mentorship and recognizes positive mentee-mentor engagement, mentorships will again be viewed as vital to professional development.²⁵ Several key strategies can be employed to revitalize and sustain career-stage mentorship in social and administrative pharmacy:

- Organizations should formally acknowledge and reward mentorship initiatives. This can be done by allocating specific time for mentorship activities and incorporating mentoring into performance reviews. Providing senior pharmacists with mentorship training programs can also enhance their skills and commitment to mentoring.
- Technology can help overcome barriers to mentorship. Virtual mentorship programs can connect mentors and mentees across different geographic regions, facilitating frequent interactions despite busy schedules. Online tools and platforms can assist with meeting scheduling, resource sharing, and progress tracking.
- Establishing structured programs with clear guidelines, goals, and timelines can make mentorship more effective and consistent. These programs should match mentors and mentees based on predefined criteria, such as career objectives, areas of expertise, and professional interests. Regular evaluations and feedback can help monitor the progress and impact of the mentorship.
- Creating a professional culture that supports and values mentoring is crucial. This can be achieved by highlighting the benefits of mentoring at professional events and in institutional communications, sharing success stories, and recognizing positive mentoring experiences. Encouraging experienced pharmacists to share their insights and experiences can inspire others to mentor.

3. Conclusion

Career-stage mentorship is declining in social and administrative pharmacy and may ultimately be lost altogether. To address the potential loss of this valuable practice, it is necessary to understand why it is in decline and implement strategies targeted at restoring its importance to the profession and its practice. These efforts are not simply about safeguarding a convention, they are vital to the excellence of this profession and its sustained development and growth.

3.1. A request for action

Collectively, pharmacists and pharmacy educators and leaders must take steps to reinvigorate career-stage mentorship in social and administrative pharmacy. In this way, the knowledge and experience of our most accomplished practitioners will not be lost but will be harnessed to develop and motivate the next generation. It is hoped that this paper will inform the creation of guidelines for the implementation of formally recognized, appropriately structured career-stage mentorship opportunities in pharmacy colleges and that such programs will, in turn, help advance this discipline.

It is imperative for leaders, pharmacy educators, and pharmacists to collaborate in revitalizing intergenerational mentorship in social and administration pharmacy. Key actions include conducting comprehensive evaluations to identify gaps in knowledge, skills, and professional development among recent graduates and early-career pharmacists. Establishing clear criteria for selecting mentors, including professional background, time commitment, and the ability to provide constructive feedback, is essential. Training programs should be developed to equip mentors with the necessary skills. Well-organized mentorship initiatives with clear objectives, timelines, and regular assessments ensure effective and reliable mentoring, promoting consistent communication and progress tracking. Leveraging technology, such as online platforms and virtual meeting tools, can overcome time and location constraints, facilitating more frequent and flexible interactions between mentors and mentees. Ultimately, creating a culture that values and encourages mentoring is crucial. This can be achieved by celebrating successful mentorship stories, offering incentives to mentors, and integrating mentoring into the institution's professional development framework.

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Availability of data and materials

The original contributions presented in the study are included in the further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding authors.

Ethics approval and consent to participate

Not applicable.

Consent for publication

All authors are agreed for publication of this manuscript in journal of Exploratory Research in Clinical and Social.

CRedit authorship contribution statement

Ammar Abdulrahman Jairoun: Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Project administration, Methodology, Investigation, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization. **Sabaa Saleh Al-Hemyari:** Writing – review & editing, Visualization, Validation, Methodology, Conceptualization. **Moyad Shahwan:** Writing – original draft, Visualization, Supervision, Project administration, Methodology. **Mena**

Al-Ani: Writing – original draft, Resources. **Mustafa Habeb:** Writing – review & editing, Validation. **Faris El-Dahiyat:** Writing – review & editing, Supervision, Software, Investigation.

Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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