LETTER

Leadership Strengths and the Future of Pharmacy

To the Editor: In the May 2017 issue of the American Journal of Pharmaceutical Education, Dr. Ferreri and colleagues published an insightful article entitled “Academic Pharmacy: Where is Our Influence?” Evaluation of our skills as a profession to more effectively develop a strategy for advancing the profession of pharmacy is paramount to success. Findings of this report are based on StrengthsFinder 2.0 results from cohorts 1-10 of the Academic Leadership Fellows Program (ALFP), which consists of AACP members selected from nominated applicants in a position to accept leadership responsibilities and who exhibit ethics and values consistent with AACP. Those applicants with higher administrative rank will be considered first as prospective members of each cohort. Findings of Dr. Ferreri and colleagues indicate that in this sample of academic pharmacy leadership, the predominant talents were in the strategic thinking (34.4%) and executing (31.1%) and least frequent talents were in the relationship building (23.3%) and influencing domain (11.2%). Based on these data, the authors concluded that academic pharmacy leaders are largely deficient in the influencing and relationship building leadership domains and that the talents of academic leaders are similar to those of pharmacy students.

Experiential faculty at the University of Georgia College of Pharmacy implemented an assigned leadership model in the third professional year Introductory Pharmacy Practice Experience (IPPE). Evaluation and assessment of students included results from Clifton’s StrengthsFinder 2.0 and an adaptation of the Lifelong Leadership Inventory (LLI) developed by the National Center for Healthcare Leadership. The third-year student pharmacists were similar to the ALFP with the most infrequent talents being in the influencing domain (8%). However, the majority of students (40%) fell within the relationship building domain, followed by executing (35%) and strategic thinking (17%). Interestingly, students in the domain of relationship building ranked their leadership abilities lower than members of the other domains. Students in the executing domain rated their ability with the skills of “challenging the status quo” and “makes persuasive oral presentations” as the two skills they were least confident in achieving. From an educational standpoint, we saw opportunities to support student perceived lack of confidence based on the leadership domain and strengths.

In an analysis of StrengthsFinder results from 44 student pharmacists at Campbell University College of Pharmacy and Health Sciences, Dr. Timothy Bloom found that executing was the predominant leadership theme (35%) followed by relationship building (16%) and strategic thinking (16%). Thirty-three percent of students did not have a prominent domain. Of the 1244 student pharmacists at Michigan, Minnesota, Nebraska, Ohio State, and Purdue, Janke and colleagues reported similar results with the predominant domain of executing (22.1%), followed by relationship building (21%), strategic thinking (11.7%), and influencing (3.2%). Forty-two percent of students did not have a dominant domain. Similar to the UGA cohort, executing and relationship building are the predominant domains for these student pharmacists (Table 1).

A comparison of the top three individual strengths from each group show that achiever (executing domain), harmony (relationship building domain), and learner (strategic thinking domain) are common to the three student cohorts. The ALFP cohort also ranked achiever and learner in their top three themes but selected relator from the relationship building domain. The student pharmacists and pharmacy academicians do have much in common (Table 1).

The conclusion of Dr. Ferreri’s article states that the talents of pharmacy professionals align with executing and strategic thinking leadership domains and the profession is low in relationship building and influencing leadership domains. While this is representative of the strengths of the ALFP cohorts, relationship building is a prevalent leadership domain among students as evidenced by the cohorts previously discussed. Results of the AFLP may be more reflective of leaders in pharmacy; results of students may be more reflective of the profession as a whole (ie, student pharmacists will enter a variety of practice settings, rather than a focused area such as academic pharmacy leadership). As pharmacy continues to transform into a patient-centered health care team model, the relationship building strengths of “adaptability, developer, connectedness, empathy, harmony, include, individualization, positivity, and relator” are traits that will contribute to the advancement of our profession.

It is also important to note that regardless of the cohort, the influencing domain is lacking among pharmacy professionals. The influencing domain strengths of “activator, communication, command, competition, maximizer, self-assurance, significance, and woo” are important traits to promote and advance pharmacy within the frameworks.
of political, organizational, and interprofessional settings. Dr. Ferreri and colleagues point out the importance of pharmacists aligning with those individuals having influential leadership strengths in order to work toward successful collaboration in interprofessional health care initiatives and patient care.

Recognizing our strategic thinking and executing strengths as pharmacy educators, we must challenge our students to identify and utilize their strengths. Increased confidence in communication and leadership skills will promote successful working relationships with health care professionals who have different strengths and leadership styles.

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| Table 1. Summary of Leadership Domains and Top Strengths |
|---------------------------------------------------------|
| **Executing (%)** | **Relationship building (%)** | **Strategic thinking (%)** | **Influencing (%)** | **No prominent domain** |
| **Achiever** | **Restorative** | **Responsibility** | **Harmony** | **Empathy** | **Relator** | **Learner** | **No prominent domain** |
|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------|-----------|-------------|-------------|-------------------|
| Campbell        |                 |                 |           |           |             |             |                   |
|                 | 31.1            |                 | 16        | 16        | 0           | 33          |
| Midwestern      |                 |                 |           |           |             |             |                   |
| Schools         | 22.1            |                 | 21        | 11.7      | 3.2         | 42          |
| Cohort          |                 |                 |           |           |             |             |                   |
| University of   |                 |                 |           |           |             |             |                   |
| Georgia College | 35              |                 | 40        | 17        | 8           |             |
| of Pharmacy     |                 |                 |           |           |             |             |                   |
| Academic        |                 |                 |           |           |             |             |                   |
| Leadership      | 31.1            |                 | 23.3      | 34.4      | 11.2        |             |
| Fellows         |                 |                 |           |           |             |             |                   |
|                 |                 |                 |           |           |             |             |                   |