

Do You Know How to Speed Network?

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More than 80 pharmacy professionals helped 100 Rutgers pharmacy students practice their networking skills at a recent event that used a speed dating format.

The 7th annual pharmacy speed networking event, organized by the student chapters of the Academy of Managed Care Pharmacy (AMCP) and Alpha Zeta Omega (AZO) fraternity, was held this spring semester at Rutgers University's Ernest Mario School of Pharmacy.

Pharmacy professionals whose careers span the pharmaceutical industry, managed care, hospitals, academia, and community pharmacy helped students engage in conversations about personal and professional development.

Every year, the event provides a unique opportunity for students to practice the underappreciated skill of striking up a conversation with a complete stranger with whom they may only have a single, but important, connection: a passion for pharmacy.

Students were expected to sit down, introduce themselves, and then immediately engage in conversation about the professionals' personal career paths as well as their advice on how the students can best use their time in school to make themselves competitive in today's job market. The night was full of 10-minute back-and-forth conversations as everyone tried to figure out what kind of relationships could be built in such a short time.

“Students who attend the event for the first time sometimes freak out when they are told what they have to do,” said Jessica Yujin Jung, PharmD student and president of Rutgers' AMCP student chapter. “I was the same way at first. This was my third time attending this event, however, and I found myself much more comfortable with listening to the insight the professionals had to offer and articulating all the questions I had for them.”

Pharmacy is often said to be a small world, and the Northeast has a dense population of pharmacists

occupying various positions in which they can market their clinical and business knowledge.

Pharmacy students and recent graduates don't always know who they are going to run into, how much time they will have to build a professional relationship with that person, or even whether a relationship is worth pursuing.

Dean Joseph Barone, PharmD, FCCP, reinforced this concept in his keynote address at the event. Networking isn't something that is directly taught in classes, he noted. However, practice makes perfect, and the classroom does give students more practice than they may realize.

Each graduating class of PharmDs can be an exclusive network of colleagues that members of the class can leverage. Every clinical, tenured, or adjunct faculty member could go from teaching a student about disease state guidelines one day to completing a research project on that disease with that same student a few years down the road.

Nimit Jindal, president of the Rutgers pharmacy Class of 2019, attended the event despite having a midterm exam the next morning.

"The time was well worth it," Jindal said when asked why he decided to speed network rather than do some last-minute studying. "Opportunities like this don't come around too often."

This year, the students were honored to have in attendance Drs. Gautam Gangoli and Bhavini Parikh, 2 successful pharmacists who cofounded the event as students in 2010. Having experienced the event through the lens of both a student and a professional, Dr. Gangoli said he believes it is one of the most important events of the year. The professionals who attend every year use this event not only as a way to add to their network, but also to maintain their existing one.

Alumni are proud to return to their old stomping grounds, see their colleagues, and collectively give back to students as a way of paying it forward, Dr. Gangoli noted. AMCP and AZO plan to hold this event again next year and to widen its reach to help as many students as possible in the years to come.

Even in this growing technologic age, in which the use of LinkedIn, Facebook, and smartphones is seemingly ubiquitous, networking face-to-face still proves to be the most meaningful way to get to know someone in the professional world.