

Postbaccalaureate PharmD Programs for Canadian Pharmacists: Options and Considerations

Substantial changes are occurring in the education of Canadian pharmacists. Over the past decade, there has been a transition from the Bachelor of Science in Pharmacy (BScPharm) to the entry-level Doctor of Pharmacy (ELPD).¹ With some universities already graduating ELPD students, practising pharmacists may be reflecting on program options to obtain a postbaccalaureate PharmD or ELPD equivalent.

Program Options for Postbaccalaureate PharmD

Several programs are available to Canadian pharmacists seeking a postbaccalaureate PharmD; however, the specifics of the programs differ widely (Table 1).²⁻⁶ Until recently in Canada, traditional postbaccalaureate PharmD programs were available from the University of British Columbia² and the University of Toronto.⁶ However, with the University of Toronto suspending its full-time program, the University of British Columbia is the only Canadian institution enrolling full-time postbaccalaureate PharmD students in 2014. For those interested in part-time studies, nontraditional postbaccalaureate PharmD distance programs remain an option.^{3,4} Additionally, the University of British Columbia,² University of Toronto,⁶ and University of Waterloo⁵ anticipate enrolment in a postbaccalaureate PharmD “bridging” program in the coming months. These bridging programs

will develop the knowledge and skills of baccalaureate-trained pharmacists comparable to ELPD graduates. Available programs continue to evolve.

Considerations for Continuing beyond a Baccalaureate Degree in Pharmacy

Within the profession, opinions differ regarding the transition to the ELPD. Some pharmacists express concern over employment stability, while others are confident in their education and work experience. Certainly the ELPD program does not lessen the value of a baccalaureate degree or years of experiential learning. Nevertheless, some practitioners continue to seek further education.

As a pharmacist, why return to life as a student? According to recent graduates, the most common reason for completing a postbaccalaureate PharmD program is to remain competitive within the profession.⁷ There are numerous programs, in addition to the PharmD, available to pharmacists, including pharmacy residencies, doctoral and master's programs, and MBA (master of business administration) programs, that potentially offer a competitive edge. A specific program should be selected based on alignment of the program's objectives with the individual's career goals.

Although job satisfaction is multifactorial, improvement in this area is a common reason for seeking a postbaccalaureate PharmD.⁷ These educational programs increase satisfaction by allowing knowledge development that will improve patient care and advance clinical practice, as well as leadership and research skills. Pharmacists interested in management, research, or education may also wish to pursue a postbaccalaureate PharmD, as graduates from these programs have been found to spend more time working within these areas relative to pharmacists with a baccalaureate degree or an ELPD.⁸ Postbaccalaureate PharmD graduates obtain the skills and knowledge required to achieve and succeed in various desirable job opportunities.

Even the most motivated student should consider the difficult balance of pursuing career advancement with achieving personal goals. Pharmacists completing a postbaccalaureate PharmD program will experience a range of delays in achieving their personal goals. Postbaccalaureate PharmD programs may require relocating or being away from home for extended periods of time. Additionally, staggering tuition fees are common among the programs available to Canadians (Table 1). Personal sacrifices should not be overlooked.

Although several options currently exist for Canadian pharmacists seeking a postbaccalaureate program, the programs vary greatly in content, duration, and cost. Therefore, each individual should select the program that will best support his or her career goals. Potential postbaccalaureate PharmD students would be wise to explore each program's benefits and drawbacks in relation to both career and personal endeavours.

Table 1. Postbaccalaureate PharmD Programs Available to Canadian Pharmacists

Type of PharmD Program and Institution	Type of Study	Duration		Total Cost (Can\$)*	Class Size
		Total	Experiential Training		
Traditional					
University of British Columbia ²	Full-time	20 mo	12 mo	44 000	Small (e.g., 8 graduates in 2013)
Nontraditional					
University of Colorado ³	Part-time	3 yr (minimum)	30 wk†	42 880 to 58 910	Variable
University of Florida ⁴	Part-time	3 yr (minimum)	4 wk (minimum)	45 360 to 63 720	Variable
ELPD Bridging Program					
University of British Columbia ²	Part-time	3 to 5 yr	6 mo†	Not yet available; anticipated enrolment January 2016	20 to 30
University of Waterloo ⁵	Part-time	8 mo to 3 yr	Additional information to be released mid-2014; anticipated enrolment in 2015 for University of Waterloo BScPharm graduates (i.e., those who completed the program within past 3 yr)		
University of Toronto ⁶	Information regarding admission criteria, tuition cost, and program duration not yet available; anticipated enrolment in 2014				

N==ELPD = entry-level PharmD.

*US dollars were converted to Canadian dollars using a conversion rate of \$1.08 (Bank of Canada, July 17, 2014).

†For students with prior practice experience, the University of Colorado and the University of British Columbia offer the option to challenge experiential training for credit.

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