

## **Abstract**

### **Objective**

Diversity in pharmacy is more than statistic. It directly influences patient trust and communication. Although national organizations have emphasized the importance of diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility, minority students, particularly African American students, remain underrepresented in pharmacy schools and in the profession. While application numbers have increased gradually, representation and retention have not kept pace. For many students of color, exposure to pharmacy occurs by chance rather than through intentional outreach. Once enrolled, consistent academic and social support is not always guaranteed. The purpose of this study was to better understand what draws minority students to pharmacy, what challenges were encountered, and what meaningful changes could improve recruitment and retention.

### **Methods**

An anonymous, cohort study was conducted via survey to deduce how pharmacists and pharmacy students of color explore early exposure to the profession, motivations for pursuing pharmacy, professional satisfaction, and recommendations for reform. Responses were collected electronically and analyzed using descriptive statistics and thematic analysis of open-ended responses.

### **Results**

A total of 50 responses were received, with 46 meeting inclusion criteria. Most respondents identified as African American and were early-career pharmacists or current students. The majority first learned about pharmacy in high school or during undergraduate education, often through family members or mentors. Location and financial aid were the strongest influences on pharmacy school selection. While most respondents described themselves as satisfied with their careers, their recommendations highlighted areas for improvement. Four primary themes emerged: structured mentorship and social support, stronger academic inclusion and peer tutoring, earlier exposure to pharmacy in underserved communities, and expanded scholarship and financial assistance opportunities. These findings suggest that recruitment alone is insufficient.

### **Conclusion**

Representation must be intentional, sustained, and supported through institutional commitment. By implementing mentorship networks, early outreach initiatives, and meaningful financial support systems, pharmacy schools can build a more inclusive and representative workforce. A profession that reflects the diversity of the communities it serves is better equipped to provide culturally responsive care, strengthen patient relationships, and advance health equity.