

Student Pharmacist Chapters of Industry-Focused Professional Organizations: A Comparison of IPhO and DIA

Interest among student pharmacists to evaluate career opportunities in the pharmaceutical industry has grown significantly in recent years. This is evidenced by the increase in the availability of undergraduate industry electives, rotations, internships, and post-graduate fellowships/residencies. Consistent with this trend is the emergence and growth on University campuses of industry-focused student groups, both with and without an affiliation with a specific national professional organization.

An important goal for all of these groups is to enhance student pharmacists' understanding of industry, help them evaluate career opportunities, and prepare them to pursue an industry-focused career. Each student group or chapter engages in activities consistent with the respective national organization's mission and vision. They all bring value to student pharmacists who choose to participate, which may include i) raising awareness of the diverse roles that industry pharmacists fulfill in the industry, ii) creating opportunities for student pharmacists to connect with industry pharmacists, iii) providing opportunities to participate in industry-focused scholarly activities, and iv) working with pharmacy school faculty/administration to promote access to industry-focused internships, rotations, and/or other experiential opportunities.

Until recently, there were limited options for participating in student pharmacist chapters of industry-focused professional organizations. Available options on some campuses have included the local Drug Information Association (DIA) chapters, as well as some non-affiliated industry-focused student pharmacist groups. In October of 2012, the Industry Pharmacists Organization (IPhO) was launched nationally to help meet the needs of the growing number of industry pharmacists and student pharmacists interested in exploring pharmaceutical industry careers. The emergence of this new pharmacist-focused professional organization has raised questions about how DIA and IPhO compare, and how student pharmacists can make an informed choice about which of these organizations, or perhaps both, will best help them realize their professional goals.

The DIA was founded in 1964 and as of 2013 has over 18,000 members globally. DIA members span the gamut of healthcare and scientific professionals, including physicians, nurses, scientists, statisticians, and pharmacists, among others. Like its diverse membership, the mission and vision of DIA is broad-based and focuses on innovation to improve health and well-being related to health products, technologies, and services, while delivering customized learning experiences, building and facilitating relationships, in a multidisciplinary neutral environment. The vision of DIA is to provide a global forum for knowledge exchange that fosters innovation to raise the level of health and well-being worldwide.

In contrast, the mission of the Industry Pharmacists Organization (IPhO) is focused, and is exclusive to advancing the careers of industry pharmacists through i) timely and relevant information for members, ii) awareness about the role of industry pharmacists in drug development and medication use, iii) targeted resources and coaching, and iv) networking and employment opportunities. IPhO is exclusive to pharmacists and student pharmacists, and advocates for the integral role that pharmacists play in the pharmaceutical industry. IPhO looks not only to advance the medical, clinical, and scientific roles for pharmacists in industry, but also to advocate for the value of industry pharmacists in commercial functions and other diverse areas of the pharmaceutical industry. The vision of IPhO is for pharmacists to be universally recognized within the industry as being the best professionally equipped to contribute to the development, commercialization, promotion and optimal use of medicines.

These two organizations offer the following to student and industry pharmacists:

DIA offers an international network of over ten thousand interdisciplinary professionals in the medical product industry, hosts an annual meeting that draws thousands of international participants, publishes the Therapeutic Innovation & Regulatory Science (TIRS) Journal, and offers a variety of volunteer roles requiring an increasing level of commitment.

IPhO consists of a much smaller, focused community that exclusively represents the needs, wants, and concerns of student pharmacists, industry fellows, academic pharmacists who serve as preceptors and/or teach industry electives, and industry pharmacists. IPhO provides student pharmacists with a network of like-minded pharmacist professionals, opportunities for leadership on a variety of national committees, virtual internships, publication opportunities, participation in industry-focused scholarly activities, confidential one-on-one career coaching services, and professional development resources such as databases for industry-focused internships, fellowships, and residencies.

If student pharmacists seeking to establish an IPhO student chapter are enrolled at a school where a DIA student chapter already exists, they may face challenges. On the surface, these two “industry” organizations may seem to offer the same benefits for student pharmacists interested in evaluating the opportunities for a career in the pharmaceutical industry. However, as described in this position paper, there are distinct differences between the two organizations that merit a serious discussion with school officials who have the responsibility of approving and providing choices in the availability of student organizations.

IPhO and DIA: A Side-by-Side Comparison

	IPhO	DIA
Mission	Advance the careers of industry pharmacists	Foster innovation to improve health and well-being worldwide
Vision	Pharmacist members are universally recognized within the industry as being the best equipped to contribute to the development, commercialization, promotion and optimal use of medicines	Global forum for knowledge exchange that fosters innovation to raise the level of health and well-being worldwide
Location	US-focused	Global
Audience	Exclusively Pharmacists and Student Pharmacists	Multidisciplinary (PhD, MS, MD, etc.)
Signature Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Professional Development, Resources and Networking • Industry-focused Scholarly Activities • Industry Pharmacist-only Job Board, and Fellowship and Internship databases • Personal 1-1 Coaching Services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TIRS Journal and Forums • Global Meetings and Training • Career Center • Networking & Communities

Conclusion

This document outlines the significant differences between IPhO and DIA, which should help student pharmacists to make an informed choice about whether one or both of these organizations will best meet their personal and professional needs, wants, and concerns. IPhO has a focused mission and vision, and the organization is exclusive to pharmacists and student pharmacists. As such, IPhO offers targeted signature services that are available only to pharmacists and student pharmacists. Students are encouraged to share this document with local faculty and administration to support the decision-making process related to student organizations.

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