

This research project is my first as a pharmacy student at Mercer. By volunteering to help Dr. Annesha Lovett, Assistant Professor of Pharmacy, I was assigned a project during the summer before I started the program. This project involved analyzing Piedmont and WellStar's joint health plan and a literature review about other hospital and health plan mergers. For an inexperienced student, in both literature reviews and pharmacy knowledge, coupled with adapting to a new campus, this project represented an immense challenge. However, I was excited to discern the connections among "mergers," "hospitals," "health plans," and "wellness programs." With the support of my mentor and the resources from the Swilley Library, after 10 months of research, I have completed my first literature review and will be presenting a poster at the AMCP (Academy of Managed Care Pharmacy) conference in April.

Starting by conducting my research from home, I encountered many problems: restricted access to journals, inundation of economic and other non-healthcare journals on mergers, and lack of references about hospital and health plan mergers. Dr. Lovett had warned me that vertical mergers, partnerships between hospitals and health plans, are a groundbreaking topic: only four entities have ever entered this venture and profit from keeping the advantages secret. Therefore, she recommended that I start by searching for news articles for specific information on the four mergers. For the literature review, she encouraged me first to locate blogs and opinion pieces and to follow their references to the primary literature. She also directed me to the Swilley Library, where I could learn more about using databases and search strategies to find relevant articles.

At my first visit, I met Librarian Rebecca Engsborg who showed me how to access the LibGuides and journal articles through the Mercer's proxy. While exploring PubMed and Galileo, I realized my keywords were too limiting and required expansion; with more background reading, I learned to expand and narrow my keywords. For example, I expanded my search for "health plans" to include "insurance plans" and located more resources detailing Medicare, which led me to pursue a managed care abstract and poster to present at AMCP. Also, when I could not gain access to an article online, another librarian introduced me to the Interlibrary Loan (ILL); John Stephens was instrumental in procuring these documents, and I have continued to use his help through the ILL for other projects. As my research progressed, I began relying less on the blogs and opinion pieces and more on directly locating review articles and studies conducted by hospital organizations and consulting services for health economics.

With many resources, I had to develop a way of organizing my references. Fortunately, from the LibGuides, I located Swilley Library's APA citation guide, which included examples and exercises that helped me cite my references from the start of my research. With this guide, I have depended less on citation machines, and I can recognize the components of this style. Also, the guide has helped me format my manuscript for future publication. Though I may never relish the process of formatting my references, learning the fundamentals of APA early in my project has prevented me from backtracking to relocate sources, which has saved me time and has improved the validity of my literature review.

Research has been an exacting yet rewarding experience. The process requires patience. To complete my abstract and poster, I had to dig into the literature, get lost, and re-evaluate my methodology. Also, due to the niche nature of my topic, I had to synthesize seemingly disparate factors—Medicare Shared Savings, wellness programs, and vertical mergers—into a coherent

model, which I discovered was centered on the Affordable Care Act's healthcare reforms. From this experience, I now understand and value the far-reaching impact that research has on improving patient health. Utilizing my refined research skills and support from Dr. Lovett and the Swilley Library, I plan to pursue more projects during my education at Mercer and eventually transition into a research career.