

White Paper on Pharmacy Student Professionalism

*Recommendations of the
American Pharmaceutical Association Academy of Students of Pharmacy--
American Association of Colleges of Pharmacy Council of Deans
Task Force on Professionalism*

Task Force Members 1995-1998

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“What we as pharmacists believe our profession to be determines what it is.”
-- W.T. Hill¹

Preamble

This White Paper is the culmination of a five-year commitment by the Task Force on Professionalism to study and promote pharmacy student professionalism. The Task Force is a collaborative effort involving the American Pharmaceutical Association Academy of Students of Pharmacy (APhA-ASP) and the American Association of Colleges of Pharmacy Council of Deans (AACP-COD). The two primary goals of the Task Force are to raise awareness and to lead action on the issue of pharmacy student professionalism. The intended audience for this white paper is the entire pharmacy profession, as each member plays an important role in the development of professionalism, whether a pharmacy educator, student, practitioner, association executive, or state board member. The discussion and recommendations presented herein are intended to assist these parties as they participate in the development of professional attitudes and behaviors among future pharmacists.

Introduction

The history of pharmacy is often described according to chronological changes in the profession's role in society and the health care system. Once concerned primarily with the production of pharmaceutical products from raw materials, pharmacists in the modern industrial era have seen their primary responsibility change to safe, accurate, and efficient drug distribution. In the past two decades, however, changes in the health care environment have included new pharmaceutical manufacturing and dispensing technology in addition to dramatic restructuring of health care organization, delivery, and financing. Zacker and Mucha have suggested that these environmental changes may take away professional functions that were previously established, resulting in a loss of pharmacy's professional status.²

In response to these events and a perceived public need for expanded pharmaceutical services, the profession has embraced the paradigm of pharmaceutical care, as defined in 1990 by Hepler and Strand.³ Pharmaceutical care involves the pharmacist assuming responsibility for drug

therapy outcomes in addition to the safe, accurate, and efficient distribution of pharmaceutical products. A critical component of this paradigm shift is a renewed professional role for pharmacists in the process of actively “caring” for patients. An expanded sense of professionalism is critical to the practice of pharmaceutical care due to its patient-centered focus. Paul Pierpaoli, a pharmacy educator and practitioner, has stated that “The concept of pharmaceutical care requires pharmacists to be true ‘professionals,’ responsible patient advocates committed to achieving optimal therapeutic outcomes.”⁴ Just as the modern healthcare environment requires pharmacists to possess advanced clinical knowledge and skills, it also necessitates further development of the characteristics that make pharmacy a profession and not merely an occupation.

Experience has shown that the attitudes and behaviors that comprise professionalism cannot be learned from a textbook or lecture. Rather, they must be actively acquired and inculcated through the process of professional socialization. In this sense, the development of true professionalism may simultaneously be one of the most important and yet most difficult aspects of the transition to pharmaceutical care.

Professionalization, or the development of professionalism, must begin at the earliest stages of professional education. Thus, schools and colleges of pharmacy play a critical role in this process. Likewise, mentors during early exposure to the practice environment play an important role in the professional development of pharmacy students. The Task Force elected to focus on the early stages of the developmental process rather than the professionalization that occurs in later practice years. Task Force members feel it should be the primary mission of pharmacy educators and practice mentors to inculcate pharmacy students with the attitudes and behaviors necessary to deliver pharmaceutical care.

Definitions

The Task Force used the following working definitions during its deliberations. They are adapted from the references cited.

Profession: An occupation whose members share ten common characteristics:^{5,6}

1. Prolonged specialized training in a body of abstract knowledge
2. A service orientation
3. An ideology based on the original faith professed by members
4. An ethic that is binding on the practitioners
5. A body of knowledge unique to the members
6. A set of skills which form the technique of the profession
7. A guild of those entitled to practice the profession
8. Authority granted by society in the form of licensure or certification
9. A recognized setting where the profession is practiced
10. A theory of societal benefits derived from the ideology

Professional: A member of a profession who displays the following ten traits:⁷

1. Knowledge and skills of a profession
2. Commitment to self-improvement of skills and knowledge
3. Service orientation
4. Pride in the profession
5. Covenantal relationship with the client
6. Creativity and innovation
7. Conscience and trustworthiness
8. Accountability for his/her work
9. Ethically sound decision making
10. Leadership

Professionalism: The active demonstration of the traits of a professional.

Professional socialization (professionalization): The process of inculcating a profession's attitudes, values, and behaviors in a professional. The goal of professional socialization is to develop professionalism, as defined by the ten character traits above.

Challenges in Pharmacy Student Professional Development

Pharmacy students face a number of challenges during their professional development. While the process of identifying and overcoming these challenges is often a character- and professionalism-building experience, some challenges may be barriers to positive professional socialization. In this section specific challenges are discussed that must be recognized and resolved in order to enhance pharmacy student professionalism.

Professional socialization occurs within both education and practice. A balance of positive influences in both environments is required to produce a professional practitioner. Too often, however, such balance is not present. In 1981, Manasse *et al* coined the term "inconsistent socialization" to characterize the clash that often exists between socialization forces, resulting in differences between student and recent graduate expectations about their role in health care and other individuals' expectations of their role.⁸ Students receive "mixed messages" from some practitioners and faculty members about the professional aspects of pharmacy practice. As a result, students develop "disillusionment" or "realistic disenchantment" as they progress through a pharmacy curriculum.^{9,10} Students either begin with or develop a level of idealism and optimism in the early years of training that diminishes as expectations are unmet when they progress through the curriculum, gain experience in the real world, and enter practice.¹¹

Forces of professional socialization are strong in the practice environment where pharmacy students observe and learn the professional norms of actual practice. Unfortunately, in certain practice settings, professional behavior is less than ideal. In its 1991 report, the Argus Commission concluded that, "Despite the popular use of the terms pharmacy practice and pharmacy practitioner, it is doubtful that the activities many pharmacists are engaged in warrant being called a professional practice."¹² The report went on to say that, "Pharmacy's professional values have been undermined by segments of the pharmaceutical manufacturing industry, retail

(independent and chain) pharmacy, hospitals, and other groups which define pharmacy as a profit center rather than a professional service.”¹²

The development of disillusionment or disenchantment by students is directly related to their initial exposure to some aspects of pharmacy practice.¹¹ These attitudes develop when students attempt to apply skills or knowledge acquired in the classroom to a real-life practice situation, only to have a pharmacist discourage such behavior as unnecessary or impractical in the “real world.” Furthermore, some students have reported occasions where practitioners performed illegal or unethical tasks and expected students to do the same. While these cases are hopefully the exception rather than the rule, these practices hinder student professional development and the profession’s evolution toward pharmaceutical care.

In addition, increasing financial pressures on pharmacies have made the less professional topics of third party reimbursement and margins on prescription sales even more important than ever before. The evolution of the profession toward pharmaceutical care in some settings has been limited by unresolved business issues such as payment for services, rather than appropriateness of service in terms of patient care. Action must be taken to help pharmacy students reconcile the two personalities of health professional and businessperson.¹¹

Pharmacy educators bear equal responsibility for the disillusionment or disenchantment of students who enter the workforce unprepared for the prevailing culture. The American Council on Pharmaceutical Education (ACPE) charged educators with preparing students for the professional challenges that seem to disillusion newly licensed pharmacists. The Task Force affirms this responsibility, which ACPE put forward in 1997 as part of its *Accreditation Standards and Guidelines for the Professional Program in Pharmacy leading to the Doctor of Pharmacy Degree*.

Guideline 1.4 ...The College or School should assure an understanding of pharmaceutical care by its students early in the professional program in pharmacy. The philosophy of practice as well as the necessary professional attitudes, ethics, and behaviors should evolve during the course of study. Moreover, the College or School should insure the professionalization of students, including the provision of a positive outlook for all aspects of pharmacy practice.¹³

Academia has difficulty in understanding how to deal with this conflict and often does not appreciate what professional socialization entails—a spectrum of activities that benefit the students’ professional perspectives. Pharmacy school curricula must reflect the fact that professionalization is a continuous process, and cannot occur as a result of infrequent, “catch-as-catch-can” approaches to professional development.¹¹ Curricula must also expose students very early in their academic careers to positive professional practitioners. The creation of an early, realistic professional identity will assist students in recognizing and confronting attitudes and behaviors of those who are less professional. Academia must provide forums for students to discuss the inconsistencies and the similarities they encounter in the practice environment.

Extracurricular activities are another crucial part of professionalization at the educational level. However, not all of the activities sponsored by campus-based professional organizations are

professional in nature, and some activities are quite professionally destructive. Examples include social events where alcohol is used irresponsibly, fundraisers featuring items with unprofessional phrases or sayings, or academic integrity issues such as obtaining “test files” and other academic materials against the will of faculty. It is important for professional organizations to recognize their significant role in pharmacy student professionalization and respond by sponsoring activities that promote professional ideals.

Hence, the inconsistency of professional socialization is widely apparent: Faculty and administration at schools and colleges of pharmacy need to develop the curricular and extracurricular programs necessary to inculcate a solid professional identity in the face of a practice environment that often contradicts many educational ideals. Furthermore, many practitioners need to increase their awareness of the critical role they play in professionalization. In the process of attempting to teach students about “real life,” pharmacists must reinforce positive professional socialization achieved in the educational environment. Thus, the burden of resolving this inconsistent socialization is placed squarely on the shoulders of educators, practitioners, and students themselves. Without a united, consistent commitment to increasing professionalism throughout pharmacy practice and education, inconsistent socialization will persist.

Recommendations

In order to help resolve the problem of inconsistent socialization and enhance pharmacy student professionalism, the Task Force has developed the following recommendations for pharmacy students, educators, and practitioners.

Recommendations for Students

Professionalization is not a passive process, and assuming responsibility for it is an early step that students must take when they encounter inconsistent socialization. Pharmacy students have a significant role in advancing the process of professional socialization. As the center of the process, students have an obligation to provide feedback to educators and practitioners regarding their professionalization. The Task Force recommends that students be informed and reminded of the importance of professionalism and that they develop their own plan of action for professional development. Plans should consist of measurable outcomes, and may include scholarly achievement, participation in professional associations and activities, and participation in community service activities.

The ideal time to introduce these concepts is the first day of the professional program, and students should be made aware of their own professional development on a continuous basis thereafter. A convenient time for re-emphasis may be the point in the curriculum where students learn about the paradigm of pharmaceutical care and the assumption of responsibility for patient outcomes that this practice philosophy entails. This is appropriately analogous to the responsibility students must accept for the outcomes of their plan for professional development. Thus, students will learn two parallel concepts: that they should assume more responsibility for patient care, and that they should assume more responsibility for their own professional

development. To carry the analogy one step further, *documentation* of performance is as important to appropriate professionalization as it is to patient care. Students should develop and maintain a professionalism portfolio throughout their pharmacy career, to serve as a constant reminder of the commitment they have made to society as a professional, and the progress they have made along the life-long process of becoming one. This portfolio should include a signed copy of the school's academic integrity policy, evidence of attendance at professional development events, and evidence of participation in community service and other activities that enhance professionalism.

Recommendations for Academia

Schools and colleges of pharmacy have a primary role in the professional socialization of pharmacists. It is strongly recommended that schools plan and execute a structured program of professionalization that facilitates the development of professional attitudes, behaviors, and identity. There are four phases of this process which deserve attention.

A. Recruitment

The following recommendations are made to assist schools and colleges of pharmacy as they seek to recruit applicants with exceptional professional potential. In general, the Task Force recommends that the professional characteristics of pharmacy and pharmacists be emphasized in the recruitment of potential students. More specifically, schools and colleges of pharmacy are encouraged to:

1. Sponsor informational programs, such as career shadowing days and open house events for prospective students, that emphasize the professional roles and responsibilities of pharmacists
2. Incorporate into recruitment literature the concepts and issues addressed in Oath of a Pharmacist (Appendix 1) and Commentary (Appendix 2), Pledge of Professionalism (Appendix 3), and Pharmacist's Code of Ethics (Appendix 4)
3. Inform high school and college career counselors and advisors of the character and academic traits that demonstrate strong professional potential
4. Encourage pre-pharmacy students to join professional organizations, such as the American Pharmaceutical Association Academy of Students of Pharmacy

B. Admissions

The admissions process is a crucial step in the development of professionalism since it is the filter that must separate those who will eventually become practitioners from those who will not. Thus, schools and colleges of pharmacy are challenged with identifying candidates with outstanding professional potential. To be more effective, the Task Force recommends that schools and colleges of pharmacy:

1. Adopt admissions criteria that are based upon professional outcomes desired upon graduation (ability to adapt to change, hold up under pressure, resolve conflict, etc.)
2. Assess admissions screening processes for their ability to select students with a high level of professionalism or professional potential
3. Evaluate candidates' humanistic qualities that will be predictors of success in student-centered, problem-based learning and patient care activities at the same time they are evaluating traditional objective criteria such as PCAT scores and GPA as predictors of performance in didactic, teacher-centered learning¹⁴
4. Utilize instruments such as interviews and essays that assess professional qualities
5. Involve current professional students and practitioners in the admissions process

C. Educational Programs

The term “educational program” is used in reference to the elements of the professional degree program other than the experiential learning phase. Schools and colleges of pharmacy are encouraged to take the following steps to develop a structured professional socialization process that results in optimal educational outcomes:

1. Establish faculty consensus on the definition of desired professional educational outcomes and on methods to lead to those outcomes¹²
2. Recognize the mentor role of classroom instructors, emphasizing the need to develop positive interactions with students¹¹
3. Introduce students to desired professional outcomes in the initial days of the educational process¹¹
4. Solicit support for reinforcement of the professional attitudes and behaviors from spouses, parents, family, and friends of students
5. Incorporate early use and frequent enforcement of the Pharmacist's Code of Ethics, Oath of a Pharmacist and Commentary, and Pharmacist's Pledge of Professionalism (see appendices)
6. Incorporate interdisciplinary teamwork, communication, leadership, critical thinking, and listening skills into the curriculum¹⁵
7. Identify and discuss timely professional issues in shadowing programs, small group discussions, role-playing, case studies, and other exercises
8. Encourage student involvement in state, local, and national professional organizations
9. Encourage appropriate community service and professional activities
10. Recognize professionalism with scholarships and/or awards
11. Encourage academic integrity via the use of honor codes

In addition, many institutions have found it easier to incorporate professionalism issues into curricula that emphasize problem-based, student-centered learning rather than teacher-focused lecture-based instruction. Such programs avoid Dependent Learner Deficiency and Curriculum Information Overload Syndrome.¹⁴ Academia should also evaluate and continuously refine the professionalism program, including faculty involvement as mentors and role-models.¹¹

D. Practice

The interface between education and practice occurs where the school or college of pharmacy begins to immerse the student into the practice environment. This experiential learning occurs in a semi-controlled fashion, preferably in practice sites where practitioner mentors can continue the professional development of the student. Experience has shown that the shock of inconsistent socialization can better be managed when experiential rotations begin early in the curriculum. Students and faculty have the opportunity to “debrief” after each experience by discussing the positive and negative aspects of the practice site visited. Conversely, carrying the reality of the practice environment back into the classroom can also provide a basis for continuous improvement of curriculum content and teaching methods. The opportunity to return to the academic environment and share positive and negative experiences allows faculty to help students manage the various forces they feel in their professional socialization. Students also benefit from a diverse scope of experiences in their experiential programs. A broad understanding of pharmacy practice in a variety of settings serves to prepare students for a greater number of practice sites upon graduation, making the transition into any practice environment less stressful.

The following are specific activities recommended by the Task Force for schools and colleges of pharmacy to assist in the professionalization of students during the experiential phase of their education:

1. Involve preceptors in the formation of professional development outcomes and methods to achieve these outcomes
2. Implement preceptor training programs that reflect on professional issues
3. Require preceptor adherence to professional standards
4. Encourage preceptors to maintain of a professional portfolio
5. Solicit student feedback on the professionalism of preceptors
6. Give preceptor awards and site development grants to recognize professionalism in practice

Recommendations for Practitioners

Practicing pharmacists should be aware of their critical role in professional socialization. Special care must be taken to avoid creating situations of inconsistent socialization. Accordingly, the Task Force views all practicing pharmacists as professional mentors and role models to recent pharmacy graduates and pharmacy students.

Along with this role comes the responsibility of setting positive examples for students and new practitioners. Pharmacists are encouraged to review the ten characteristics of a professional, and seek to achieve them in their daily practice. While the expectation is not perfection on the part of pharmacists, the Task Force does believe that pharmacists should recognize the importance of a professional socialization process and should do their best to contribute in a meaningful manner. Pharmacists should also reflect on how they can develop their own plan of professional development. In order to assist pharmacists in recognizing and fulfilling these roles, professional practice associations should provide education and mentorship training programs for their

practitioners. Such education should include both positive and negative examples of professional socialization, and seek to recognize those pharmacists who demonstrate exemplary mentorship. As part of this mentoring relationship, pharmacists should discuss with students or new practitioners the subject of professionalism and provide examples of professionalism in patient care and business affairs. Finally, professional associations should assist pharmacists in this process by conducting focus groups on the issue of balancing the economics of providing patient care with the service obligations of a profession. The results of such focus groups should be disseminated to emphasize the primary care-giving responsibility of pharmacy professionals.

Conclusions

The APhA-ASP/AACP-COD Task Force on Professionalism believes recent changes in the health care environment and the adoption of the practice paradigm of pharmaceutical care require that the profession recommit itself to enhancing pharmacy student professional development. However, significant challenges currently exist which threaten this development. A combination of factors in both pharmaceutical education and pharmacy practice serve to create inconsistent professional socialization throughout the pharmacy education process. This inconsistent socialization threatens the status of pharmacy as a profession and justifies immediate action on the part of pharmacy students, academia, and practicing pharmacists. The Task Force hopes that the above recommendations form the basis for meaningful steps toward improving the process by which professional attitudes and behaviors are inculcated in the pharmacists of the future.

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