

Growing professionalism in pharmacy students

Peng-Nam Yeoh

Abstract: IMU is one of 17 institutions of higher learning conducting the Bachelor of Pharmacy course in Malaysia. The White paper on pharmacy student professionalism by the Task Force of the American Pharmaceutical Association Academy of Students of Pharmacy together with the American Association of Colleges of Pharmacy Council of Deans mentioned 10 essential traits of a professional, recommending their early development. Since the beginning of the IMU Bachelor of Pharmacy (BPharm) (Hons) course in July 2004 on Registration Day, IMU has adopted the concept of developing professionalism in the pharmacy student from the very first day of university, by having the White Coat Ceremony where the entire class takes the Pledge of Professionalism (adapted from the Task Force) against the “Code of Conduct for Pharmacists and Bodies Corporate” by the Pharmacy Board of Malaysia in the presence of the Senior Director of the Pharmaceutical Services Division of the Ministry of Health, Malaysia and the President of the Malaysian Pharmaceutical Society (MPS). Throughout their 4 years in IMU, the pharmacy students are exposed to various aspects of professionalism in different subjects in their curriculum. On 23rd April 2012, when the fifth cohort of BPharm students received their final examination results, “Pharmacy Professional Day” was launched. The graduating students took the Oath of a Pharmacist (adapted from the American Association of Colleges of Pharmacy’s Oath with slight amendment). Talks by alumni and speakers from MPS aimed to facilitate the transition of the new graduate to working life as a pharmacist.

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Malaysia has a population of 28.7 million people made up of Malays (50.4%), Chinese (23.7%), Indians (7.1%) and indigenous peoples (11%).¹ Malaysia in May 2012

has 17 institutions of higher learning conducting degree courses in Pharmacy, following a 4-year curriculum, approved by the Malaysian Qualifications Agency (MQA) and supported by the Pharmacy Board of the Ministry of Health, Malaysia. Graduates need to complete 1 year of supervised training as a provisionally registered pharmacist, a prerequisite to full registration with the Pharmacy Board in order to practice as a pharmacist in Malaysia.

The pharmacist could work with the government or in the private sector. Under the Ministry of Health, the government pharmacist could work in the hospital pharmacy, the store, enforcement, product registration, pharmaceutical care, drug information, research and development or in the Clinical Research Center. In the private sector, the pharmacist could work for a multinational pharmaceutical company in sales, marketing, import, export or registration of new products. The pharmacist could go into manufacturing with local or multinational pharmaceutical manufacturers either in production, quality control, management, sales or marketing. The pharmacist could also work in a community pharmacy, filling prescriptions, selling over-the-counter medications, health or food supplements in direct contact with the consumer or client. The job of the pharmacist has evolved over time from being product centric to being patient centric. Today, pharmacists working in hospitals and community pharmacies are expected to prioritize correct use of medicines and quality use of medicines rather than profits from selling products.

Pharmacy is a profession defined by Merriam Webster dictionary as “a calling requiring specialized knowledge and often long and intensive academic preparation”. The White paper on Pharmacy Student professionalism² published by the Task Force consisting of the American Pharmaceutical Association Academy of Students of Pharmacy (APhA-ASP) together with the American Association of Colleges of Pharmacy Council of Deans (AACP-COD) mentioned that as a professional, the pharmacist is expected to show the following

For Correspondence:

Professor Yeoh Peng Nam, School of Pharmacy and Health Sciences, International Medical University, No. 126, Jalan Jalil Perkasa 19, Bukit Jalil, 57000 Kuala Lumpur, MALAYSIA

Email: pengnam_yeoh@imu.edu.my

10 traits: 1. knowledge and skills in pharmacy, 2. commitment to self-improvement, 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 and 10. leadership. These 10 traits were quoted from “Ten Marks of a Professional Working Smart.”³ Working for 5 years this Task Force recommended that the development of professionalism in the pharmacy student should start from the earliest stages of professional education.

Since the start of the International Medical University (IMU) Bachelor of Pharmacy (Hons) programme in 2004, IMU has adopted the concept of developing professionalism in the pharmacy student from the very first day of university, by having the White Coat Ceremony for pharmacy students, started in the University of Kentucky in 1995.⁴ Creating a tradition, on Registration Day, July 2004 for the first cohort, B1/04, the Dean of the School of Pharmacy welcomed the new students. A Pledge Leader of the new cohort, selected based on best overall academic, co-curricular and interview scores led the Pledge of Professionalism (developed by the Task Force, see Appendix 1) with the right hand raised and the left hand holding the Code of Conduct for Pharmacists and Bodies Corporate by the Pharmacy Board of Malaysia.⁵ The Pledge leader was robed with the white laboratory coat by the Dean, while each new student was welcomed into the pharmacy student fraternity by the respective individual senior student, who robed each new student with a new laboratory coat. The ceremony was graced by the Senior Director of the Pharmaceutical Services Division of the Ministry of Health who after handing over the symbol of professionalism (a glass mortar and pestle) to the Pledge Leader, spoke on the pharmacy profession prevailing in Malaysia. The ceremony was closed by the President of the Malaysian Pharmaceutical Society who spoke on “professionalism” in pharmacy. Throughout the 4 years of their training in IMU, the pharmacy students were exposed to various aspects

of professionalism in different subjects in their curriculum, especially in subjects relating to dispensing and pharmacy practice in years 3 and 4. This parallels the detailed analysis of the development of professionalism in various subjects in the pharmacy curriculum in 3 universities in Great Britain.⁶

On 23rd April 2012, when the fifth cohort of Bachelor of Pharmacy (Hons) students received their final examination results, “Pharmacy Professional Day” was launched. The graduating students took the Oath of a Pharmacist (adapted from the American Association of Colleges of Pharmacy’s Oath with slight amendment) as shown in Appendix 2. Talks by pharmacy alumni on different aspects of the pharmacy profession and the activities of Malaysian Pharmaceutical Society, Young Pharmacist Chapter were included to initiate the transition of the new graduate to working life as a pharmacist.

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Appendix 1: Pledge of Professionalism by the Pharmacy Student

The Pledge, has been adapted from the University of Illinois College of Pharmacy Pledge of Professionalism, 1993, & a model proposed by the Task Force on Professionalism of the American Pharmaceutical Association Academy of Students of Pharmacy & the American Association of Colleges of Pharmacy Council of Deans, 1994.

1. Pledge of Professionalism by the Pharmacy Student

“As a student of pharmacy, I believe in the need to build and reinforce a professional identity founded on integrity, ethical behavior, and honour. This development, a vital process in my education, will help ensure that I am true to the professional relationship I establish between myself and society as I become a member of the pharmacy community. Integrity will be an essential part of my everyday life and I will pursue all academic and professional endeavours with honesty and commitment to service.

To accomplish this goal I will:

- A. **DEVELOP** a sense of loyalty and duty to the profession of pharmacy by being a builder of community, one able and willing to contribute to the well-being of others and one who enthusiastically accepts the responsibility and accountability for membership in the profession.
- B. **FOSTER** professional competency through life-long learning. I must strive for high ideals, teamwork and unity within the profession in order to provide optimal patient care.
- C. **SUPPORT** my colleagues by actively encouraging personal commitment to the Code of Conduct for Pharmacists And Bodies Corporate by the Pharmacy Board of the Ministry of Health, Malaysia.
- D. **DEDICATE** my life and practice to excellence. This will require an ongoing reassessment of personal and professional values.

D. **MAINTAIN** the highest ideals and professional attributes to ensure and facilitate the covenantal relationship required of the pharmaceutical care-giver.

The profession of pharmacy is one that demands adherence to a set of ethical principles. These high ideals are necessary to ensure the quality of care extended to the patients I serve. As a student of pharmacy, I believe this does not start with graduation; rather, it begins with my membership of this professional university community.

Therefore, I will strive to uphold this pledge as I advance toward full membership in the profession.”

Appendix 2: Oath of a Pharmacist

The Oath below is adapted from the American Association of Colleges of Pharmacy’s Oath with slight amendment).

“I promise to devote myself to a lifetime of service to others through the profession of pharmacy. In fulfilling this vow I will draw upon my innovation, imagination and insight to contribute effectively as a member of the healthcare team.

- I will consider the welfare of humanity and relief of suffering my primary concerns.
- I will apply my knowledge, experience, and skills to the best of my ability to assure optimal outcomes for my patients.
- I will respect and protect all personal and health information entrusted to me.
- I will accept the lifelong obligation to improve my professional knowledge and competence.
- I will hold myself and my colleagues to the highest principles of our profession’s moral, ethical and legal conduct.
- I will embrace and advocate changes that improve patient care.
- I will utilize my knowledge, skills, experiences, and values to prepare the next generation of pharmacists.

I take these vows voluntarily with the full realization of the responsibility with which I am entrusted by the public.”