

Perspectives on Professionalism: Shared Responsibility for the Future of Pharmacy

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Abstract

The goal of this article is to relate perspectives of a faculty member, a pharmacy preceptor, a recent graduate, and two students from the University of Maryland School of Pharmacy about the key attributes of a pharmacy professional and to link them to education and the future of pharmacy. With growing numbers of schools/colleges of pharmacy and qualified candidates for admission, professionalism continues to be an important, yet elusive, focus. As a top-ranked school, we pride ourselves on comprehensive programs, an innovative curriculum, and a notable tradition of advancing practice. However the educational enterprise is challenged to recruit faculty, to compete for students with other schools/college of pharmacy and even other health professions, to balance budgets, and to build relationships with stakeholders, alumni, legislators, and donors for support. This article, written in the form of a conversation in this current environment, will identify foundational definitions of professionalism and the opportunities to apply professional attributes and traits to the profession of pharmacy and our communities. In order for the profession to flourish, such conversations should occur regularly so that the professional relationships among faculty, preceptors, graduates, and students are fortified for the future.

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Introduction

Professionalism is our goal post, to use an American football metaphor. It is a standard by which we educate future practitioners, measure our accomplishments as pharmacists, and collectively earn respect as a profession. It is the ideal toward which we continually strive but which we seldom attain in total.

Why is professionalism elusive? The answer to this question is two-fold. First, it must be defined in context of education and practice. Second, it must be attained by humans who vary by intellect, personality,

values, behaviors, culture, attitudes, expertise, and skills. With the added complexities of contemporary life, pharmacists must sometimes work against their inherent nature and personal circumstances to advance professional values.

Maryland has specifically set expectations for professionalism over the last decade based in large measure on the White Paper on Pharmacy Student Professionalism (Benner, 2000). The ten traits are introduced at the beginning of the first professional year and are reinforced in didactic and experiential courses. A more recent white paper approved by the

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American College of Clinical Pharmacy Board of Regents (Roth and Zlatic, 2009) in 2008 complements the previous document and has provided foundational guidelines for pharmacy practice laboratory activities and requirements. These two articles are the basis for the following 'conversation,' as are essays from the contributors.

Dr. Boyle- Faculty Member

For the most part, professional issues are rare among students, faculty, and preceptors. However, when incidents occur, they are significant because they can adversely affect not only a student's reputation, but also that of their school. I strongly believe that caring professional relationships are essential between current and future practitioners as stated by Abramowitz (2001). As a faculty member, I care for my students, but I also must assure academic integrity, fairness to all students, and confidentiality. This is similar to the professional paradigm which requires integrity, fairness and ethical treatment of patients, and confidentiality.

Dr. Kumarachandran- Graduate, Class of 2009

During my first few months at Maryland, I found the concept of professionalism hard to grasp, dismissing it as an abstract concept tossed around like loose change. I was offended by the administration's attempts to change the way I was to dress and behave. I finally decided to sit down and analyze what I was fighting for. That was when I began to realize the responsibilities I had as a Maryland student and the long term benefits of adhering to the professionalism criteria designated by our school.

Dr. Simmons Gray- Preceptor

I have a family full of educators. One of my fondest memories is playing school as a child. I could not wait to be the teacher. It was very important to me to be the best teacher possible. As I reflect back on

those early childhood days, I see that my attitude about teaching has not changed. I still desire to be the best teacher possible. I never lost my love for teaching and thus I was very excited to become a preceptor. To do two things (pharmacy practice and education) professionally that I love is a great honor. I expect professionalism from all students and in order to expect it, I must demonstrate professionalism. I precept students from various backgrounds and in different stages of their professional lives. My challenge has been to develop an advanced pharmacy practice experience (APPE) that meets the needs of every student. I feel that it is very important as a preceptor to be flexible and as respectful to students as you expect them to be to you. Mutual respect is very important.

Ms. Lu- Class of 2012

Many think that pharmacy practice and professionalism are two different ideas. The public often equates pharmacy practice simply with medication dispensing. If pharmacists are mere drug dispensers, then we are perhaps the most over-trained and overpaid assembly line workers. The real rationale behind the amount of education and compensation pharmacists receive is the responsibility we carry to serve the public as health care professionals. Pharmacy is a profession where its members contribute to the community by providing quality pharmaceutical care.

Ms. Low- Class of 2012

Individualism is pervasive in American culture. Fewer Americans are voting; fewer are participating in civic life. Even if problem-solving via collaboration- working together and sharing views- is waning, citizens can step up and become leaders. They can be active citizens and interact within their communities and with peers. Citizen leaders can achieve goals that positively influence the people

around them. Professionalism is intertwined with citizen leadership, especially the components of self-improvement and service orientation. There are many ways that I can begin transforming into an effective citizen leader right now.

Ms. Lu – Class of 2012

Citizen leaders possess similar qualities as professionals. They are trustworthy, service-oriented, and conscientious. The well being of a community translates into the well being of individuals. Therefore, it is natural for individuals to assume responsibilities to improve conditions of their communities. However, in order to be an effective leader, one needs to first be able to identify with those in one's community. This requires understanding of diversity and thus development of personal connections with the community members.

Dr. Boyle

I agree that professionalism and leadership are linked with pharmacy education, pharmacy practice, and community engagement. I had polled the first year students in the Class of 2008 for what professional traits they still needed to develop (Boyle, 2006). As expected, 44% of the students cited knowledge and skills, but a third of the class listed leadership. As students develop their expertise to become practitioners, they must also develop the leadership skills to become effective within their practice site, their organization, and their communities as mentioned previously. By deploying expertise and leadership, future pharmacists will become influential. At the White Coat Ceremony, Maryland students take the Pledge of Professionalism (Benner, 2000). The phrase which resonates the most for me is, "to 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..."

Ms. Low

Most student leaders here at the School are already self-motivated in many areas. After all, they were accepted into a professional program and elected to those organizational positions. As a student leader, I am motivated in academics and organizations, but citizen leadership is a different story. In the past, I have considered civic life as an "extra." I had an attitude that it is alright to ignore civic life since I have a demanding schedule, as well as personal interest. I would participate in citizen life if it were convenient to me. The problem is that it might not ever be convenient. Citizen leaders need to remember that the goal is not self-improvement for self-improvement's sake. We are committing to self-improvement in order to positively influence the lives of others. We may want to change the world, and who know, some of us may end up doing just that.

Dr. Kumarachandran

I like to consider the four pillars of professionalism- communications, appearance, timeliness, and initiative (Boyle et al., 2006). I can say that in my own experience I have violated each and every one of these principles. I had the privilege of speaking to incoming students about integrating the standards of professionalism into their attitudes and behaviors. The important aspect for us to realize is that as we integrate professionalism into our lives, we are harvesting habits from which we can reap benefits throughout our careers.

Ms. Lu

I am currently working on being a champion for my future patients' health by focusing on acquiring comprehensive clinical knowledge. Pharmaceutical expertise is unique in pharmacists, and therefore pharmaceutical care is the area where pharmacists can contribute the most to society. However, I want to be a pharmacist who can not only address the

patient's medical problems, but also help resolve the economic or social barriers that prevent patients from taking their medications. Therefore, I am active in many professional organizations to learn how I can contribute to my patients' health in other ways aside from the clinical interventions. I hope I can be a well-rounded pharmacist who can better contribute to the community and the pharmacy profession.

Dr. Simmons Gray

Realizing that students are the future of our profession, I feel obligated to do all I can to ensure they get a great learning experience. I feel very fortunate to have had what I consider great students. It pleases me to see the future of our profession so promising. I look at students as future colleagues and am very excited to see the growth during their tenure with me (See Table 1).

Table 1 Dr. Simmons Gray's Precepting Pearls for the Future

<u>Future</u>	Students are our future. They are the lifeline of our profession. When we invest in students, we invest in ourselves and our profession.
<u>fUture</u>	Utilize and develop students' special talents and interests. Promote creativity; challenge them to suggest an improvement for your practice.
<u>fuTure</u>	Take the time to talk to students and give them regular feedback. Do not be afraid to say job well done or to offer constructive feedback for improvement.
<u>futUre</u>	Do not underestimate their contribution to your practice. Students come to you seeking hands on experience. We should look at ourselves as confidence builders.
<u>futuRe</u>	Remember that a student's APPE is a reflection of you and your practice. Students document their experiences in their curriculum vita. Their reflection becomes part of your reputation.
<u>futureE</u>	Expectations should be realistic, achievable, and discussed. One of the first questions I ask students is, "What are your expectations from this experience?" After finding out their expectations, I share mine. Making this the best learning experience possible is always an expectation.

Implications

Pharmacy education is a community of teachers and learners. Although the general topic of this 'conversation' is professionalism, several themes emerged. First, setting expectations is essential in all areas of pharmacy education and practice. Students need to understand a school's expectations of them as mentioned by Dr. Kumarachandran. Faculty need clear communication about expectations as they relate to service, scholarship, and teaching; but more importantly, they need to find their distinct role within the school in order to effectively work with faculty, staff, students, and stakeholders. Excellent preceptors set expectations in a collaborative manner which encourages input from students. From a broader perspective, schools/colleges should seek practitioners' expectations for their graduates when crafting the institutional mission and vision.

Secondly, professionalism relates to the acts of individuals and organizations. At times the label of 'professionalism' is overused and inappropriately applied. For that reason, students, faculty, preceptors, and individuals/groups allied with pharmacy education should examine the literature in order to establish the basis for professionalism. This relates to the first point regarding expectations. Pharmacists cannot be all things to all people, but they can target their knowledge, values, and skills to patients who need them. The same knowledge, value, and skills which serve patients in a pharmacist's vocation may also serve his or her avocation, family, volunteer organization, or community. Pharmacists, and in turn pharmacy education, may in fact underestimate the sphere of influence created by such competent, confident, experienced professionals.

Finally, students clearly articulated the link between professionalism and leadership and applied both to citizenship. For those who do not see themselves as leaders, they are encouraged to examine a broader definition of leadership.

Leadership encompasses more than positional or elected office. By taking responsibility for patient outcomes, pharmacists are accountable for making process improvements, monitoring quality measures, and partnering with other health professionals. Leadership is an essential trait which can be enhanced among effective health care team members.

Summary

Dr. Max Ray, former dean of the College of Pharmacy, Western University of Health Sciences in Pomona, California, wrote a commentary about noblesse oblige and moral commitment (Ray, 2006). In the article written as a short story, a pharmacy student is receiving the Rho Chi award. Her encounter with an old man, who is seeking to understand the award, centers on her gifts of intelligence and hard work. The man challenges her about what she will do with her gifts... for her patients and her profession.

The term noblesse oblige refers to the special obligations which come with special advantages. As faculty, preceptors, graduates and students, we often concentrate on the tasks at hand. Most of us are intelligent and willing to work hard, but as the old man states in Dr. Ray's commentary, "I'm trying to get you to think about the innate responsibility of professionals to serve society in a much broader way than through their specialized fields. I believe that a professional feels a special connection with all of mankind and has an instinct to serve." Pharmacy education prepares us for practice; professionalism enables us to serve.

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