

Teaching appropriate behaviour to pharmacy students and assessing it

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Enthusiastic rhetoric has surrounded the issue of professionalism in recent discussions concerning desirable skills and attitudes within the healthcare context (eg, *PJ*, 15 December 2007, p678). This is part of a wide ranging debate on what it is to be a professional. A particular point of contention relates to how professional attitudes and behaviours can be learnt, and what can be done at an undergraduate level to foster appropriate professional attitudes and skills.

In recent years, such attitudes and skills have been increasingly included in healthcare professions' training programmes, with the General Medical Council taking the lead by establishing a requirement for professional attitudes to be taught, as set out in "Tomorrow's Doctors" (2002). Indeed, medical educators have acted as pioneers in this area, developing techniques for teaching and evaluating professional attitudes at undergraduate level. This moves away from the old model, which placed a heavy emphasis on teaching knowledge and skills. In the past, professional attitudes and behaviour were considered important, but were not taught explicitly or assessed systematically. This could, potentially, lead to a situation where students graduate with high grades but poor professional attitudes. Students do not arrive at university with fully formed professional attitudes and behaviours, and these need to be taught and modelled.

Pharmacists, like other healthcare professionals, value their professional status and, consequently, need to adhere to a standard of professionalism. This is reinforced by the Council of the Royal Pharmaceutical Society through developments, such as the new code of ethics. The Society's recent "Fit for the future" consultation (phase 2), part of the education policy development programme (available on the consultations page of the Society's website, www.rpsgb.org), is a clear indication of pharmacy's commitment to the goal of enhancing professionalism through undergraduate education.

Within the wider context of professionalism and professionalisation of pharmacy, educators must look to their role in developing mechanisms, first to teach professional attitudes and behaviours, and, secondly, to assess students' skills in this area. To this end, a new model of assessment will be implemented at

the School of Pharmacy, University of Central Lancashire (UCLan) later this year and be used for our first year MPharm students. This system was previously adapted by one of us (Gordon Becket) in New Zealand, from a model developed for use in the schools of medicine at the University of Otago. The school of pharmacy will institute

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a system of professional attitudes and conduct (PAC) assessment and evaluation, with the aim of continuously assessing student performance. The system will add to existing assessment methods that measure the traditional aspects of knowledge and clinical skills. It will evaluate professional behaviour by monitoring professional skills and attitudes

The scope of the assessment will increase in complexity as undergraduate training progresses. In the first year of the MPharm course, assessment mainly involves learning and demonstrating a professional attitude to attendance, cultural sensitivity, tutorial performance, communication and teamwork. In later modules, PAC teaching and assessment will be adapted to reflect the module aims, for example, appropriate attitudes to patient care, professional attitudes in cancer therapy and care, minimisation of harm and supervision of pharmacy staff.

Professionalism teaching and assessment will also be developed through the third and fourth years of the MPharm programme. This will include feedback from real and role-playing patients in placements and objective structural clinical examinations, enabling higher level communication skills and interpersonal relationships to be assessed.

The assessment will be a team effort in each section of the pharmacy school. Teaching staff from each curriculum area will tailor the instrument to include the most relevant professional attitudes for their discipline

An important aspect of the process is the use of the assessment as a formative process to help a student recognise and modify areas that require improvement. Critically, this technique provides individualised feedback so that students with attitudinal and behavioural shortcomings can improve. Where necessary, the existing pastoral care functions of the university can be brought into play to support students.

Although primarily designed as a mechanism to support student development, the process can also have a regulatory function.

Potentially, a student could pass all of the knowledge based assessments throughout the course but persist in displaying inappropriate attitudes and behaviours. The PAC evaluation provides documentary evidence from a range of sources to support any necessary course of action. The documentation also provides the opportunity to reward exceptional standards of behaviour, recognising students who are role models. By way of example, the school might award prizes to encourage students to adopt appropriate behaviours. The PAC evaluation also functions as an effective tool for small group teaching because it presents an opportunity for students to discuss and develop their own responses to professionalism.

In line with the continuing development of a professional identity, UK schools of pharmacy would benefit from adapting the PAC model for their MPharm degrees. The PAC model adds greater depth and subtlety to the fitness to practise procedures and codes of conduct that already exist in schools of pharmacy. Such an approach will work best as part of a fully integrated model of education for professionalism, which identifies effective techniques to enable students to develop and put into practice the appropriate skills and behaviours.

The existing PAC process currently encompasses a set of key attitudes reflecting an implicit model of professionalism, but we are working to make this model explicit. The PAC programme at UCLan will be subject to robust evaluation and modified, as necessary, to respond to the changing nature of the profession. Further research is also planned into how professional attitudes and behaviours might be assessed and encouraged throughout the preregistration year.

Clearly, there are problems to overcome in introducing such a scheme, not least of which relate to resources in terms of funding, and of additional time demands on teaching staff in schools of pharmacy. At UCLan, an enthusiastic and committed team has worked hard to bring this innovative approach into practice. However, education for professionalism should not be left to develop in a piecemeal fashion, dependent on the goodwill and enthusiasm of schools of pharmacy and their staff. To maintain UK pharmacy's place as a leader in the field, all those involved with pharmacy education need to develop a co-ordinated and effective response to the challenges of educating for professionalism. To this end, we would welcome communication with any teams involved in developing similar processes, and comment from other interested parties.