Chair Report of the APhA-ASP/AACP-COD Task Force on Professionalization: Enhancing Professionalism in Pharmacy Education and Practice

Robert S. Beardsley
School of Pharmacy, University of Maryland, 20 North Pine Street, Baltimore MD 21201-1180

INTRODUCTION

Professionalism is a difficult concept to describe. Most pharmacy practitioners and educators agree that professionalism should be reflected in their daily activities; but many do not realize what exactly defines their professionalism. They recognize it when it is present or lacking, but they cannot identify the specific components of it. They may realize that they need to improve their degree of professionalism or the professionalism of others, but they do not necessarily know exactly what to do. In order to address this important issue, the American Pharmaceutical Association (through its Academy of Students of Pharmacy) and the American Association of Colleges of Pharmacy (through its Council of Deans) formed a joint Task Force in 1993. The Task Force, comprised of five students and five faculty members, has met several times to discuss professionalism and how to enhance it in pharmacy practice and education (Appendix A). The primary goal of the Task Force is to make students, faculty and practitioners aware of the importance of professionalism and how their actions enhance or erode their level of professionalism.

This article describes the specific strategies that the Task Force has outlined to strengthen professionalism in the pharmacy educational experience. In preparing this report, the Task Force used a rather broad definition of professionalism: displaying values, beliefs and attitudes that put the needs of another person above your personal needs. The strategies are divided into four main areas: recruitment, admissions, educational programs and pharmacy practice. The Task Force also assigned responsibility of specific actions to appropriate pharmacy organizations.

RECRUITMENT

The first phase of pharmacy education and practice is the recruitment of new students into educational programs. Pharmacy needs to attract students who have a commitment to professionalism. Prospective students should not view earning a pharmacy degree as merely just another step to entering the workforce, but as a commitment to a profession which serves others. Students in elementary and secondary schools, as well as prepharmacy students, should be exposed to the importance of professionalism in pharmacy education and practice. Thus, recruitment materials need to be developed that address these important professional aspects. Pharmacy students and practitioners need to participate in recruitment activities; and should convey their insights about their own professionalization to future students.

In order to attract professionally oriented individuals, the Task Force recommends that the following tasks be completed:

1. Prepharmacy information programs, such as Open House events. Career Shadowing Days, or group visits by prospective students, should emphasize the professional role and responsibilities of pharmacists.
2. Promotional/educational literature should be developed and should include information on the Oath of a Pharmacist, the Oath COMMENTARY, the Pledge of Professionalism, and the Code of Ethics for Pharmacists.

3. High school, community college, and university counselors should be invited to colleges/schools of pharmacy for educational sessions on pharmacy that would emphasize the professional attributes desired in applicants.

4. State and local pharmacy organizations should emphasize the professional attributes of pharmacists in media presentations on television and radio.

5. An organizational group for prepharmacy students should be developed on different campuses. It is also recommended that prepharmacy students be enlisted into APhA-ASP chapters.

6. A centralized application service should be developed by AACP.

7. A motto for pharmacy should be established that communicates a strong sense of professionalism.

The Task Force recommends that APhA-ASP chapters and Assistant/Associate Deans for Student Affairs in all schools and colleges of pharmacy develop these educational/promotional materials. In addition, the Student Services Special Interest Group (SIG) of AACP should schedule programming to address these issues at future meetings. AACP and APHA should collaborate with other pharmacy organizations (possibly through the Joint Commission of Pharmacy Practitioners) to design promotional literature on professionalism. These programs could be used by pharmacists in their interactions with pharmacy technicians who have an interest in applying to pharmacy school. Organizations, such as the National Association of Professional Counselors/Advisors, need to be identified to facilitate this process.

A framework for discussions on professionalism should include copies of the Oath of a Pharmacist with COMMENTARY, the Pledge of Professionalism, the Code of Ethics for Pharmacists, case scenarios on ethical dilemmas, readings and references or assignments with questions. The use of videotapes, such as those developed by the University of Arizona, Iowa Pharmaceutical Association and Glaxo Welcome Inc., could be used in these programs. A motto for pharmacy would add to this overall promotional program.

An organized group of prepharmacy students would aid in the recruitment of professionally oriented students. To accomplish this, in 1995 APHA approved an associate member category within ASP for pre-pharmacy students. This membership category includes students who are enrolled in pre-pharmacy course work at institutions which do not provide professional pharmacy degree programs.

The centralized application system should enhance the perception of applicants on the professional character of pharmacy schools. Literature supplied by AACP in this process should promote the professional attributes desired in applicants. Copies of the Oath of a Pharmacist and Oath COMMENTARY, the Pledge of Professionalism, and/or Code of Ethics for Pharmacists could be part of the literature distributed by AACP to applicants.

ADMISSIONS

The second phase of pharmacy education is the admissions process where future pharmacists are screened and admitted into pharmacy educational programs. The key to this process is to develop and implement ways to identify professionally oriented applicants. The first step in the admissions process is to identify the professional criteria that schools use to assess their applicants. The second step is to develop procedures that will screen for these criteria.

In order to admit professionally oriented individuals, the Task Force recommends that the following tasks be completed:

1. Existing admissions procedures should be evaluated to determine if professional attributes are considered during the admissions process.

2. Admissions procedures and criteria should be modified based on input from students and practitioners (advisory groups, alumni, etc.).

3. Admissions criteria should be based upon outcomes desired upon graduation, (e.g., ability to adapt to change, hold up under pressure moments, etc.).

4. Colleges/schools of pharmacy should consider using interviews as part of the admissions process to assess professional attributes.

5. Written essays should also be used as part of the admissions process to assess professionalism.

The key to enhancing the admissions process is to identify and evaluate reliable instruments for assessment of professionalism in applicants. Several schools are using innovative methods. Many are using practitioners in the interview process. Several are developing scenarios or situations during interviews to determine professional attitudes. Many attempt to document the level of service and participation in volunteer activities as a means of determining student willingness to be an integral part of the community. Other schools and colleges are using extemporaneous on-site essays that provide more meaningful information than essays prepared prior to an interview. Some schools are developing professionalism assessment/outcomes plans for admission criteria. For example, the University of Arizona’s School of Medicine has developed an exercise to address this issue.

The Task Force recommends that the A. Deans for Student Affairs in all schools and colleges of pharmacy work with the Student Services SIG and the Curriculum SIG of AACP to make sure issues get addressed at future meetings.

EDUCATION PROGRAMS IN COLLEGES AND SCHOOLS OF PHARMACY

The third phase of pharmacy education is the actual program within the school. The level of professionalism within the curriculum is key to shaping the professional attributes of pharmacy students. The attitudes of faculty are critical in shaping the viewpoints of students. Faculty must realize that they are modeling professional behavior at all times when interacting with students in large lecture settings, small group sessions and even social events.

In order to train professionally oriented individuals, the Task Force recommends that the following tasks be completed:

1. New students must be introduced to the concept of professionalism in the initial stages of pharmacy education.

2. Spouses, parents and others should be involved as soon as students are admitted into the program to help articulate professional values and help foster family support of students.

3. The Oath of a Pharmacist, Pledge of Professionalism, and/or Code of Ethics for Pharmacists should be used during the early stages of the curriculum.

4. Students should be exposed to professionally oriented practitioners as soon as possible. “Shadowing” programs or small group discussions with faculty and practitioners can be used to discuss professional issues. Case studies/role-playing can also be used to demonstrate ethical and moral dilemmas.

5. Schools should develop programs to recognize professionalism using scholarships and awards by either developing new awards or by incorporating professionalism as a component of existing awards.

6. Schools should foster professionalism with student organizations by encouraging groups to engage in activities and fundraisers that are professional in nature.

7. Schools should develop opportunities for community mentoring that promote citizenship within the student population.

8. Schools must develop faculty programs to discuss methods to enhance professionalism amongst pharmacy faculty.
The Task Force recommends that school-based curriculum committees and the deans for Student Affairs develop approaches to address professionalism. The Student Services and Curriculum SIGs within AACP should also address these issues. The Dean’s Office should set the tone and faculty should model involvement in this area. School administration should provide adequate support and guidance.

State pharmacy associations must work with the schools and colleges of pharmacy to develop effective mentoring programs. Associations can assist in the development of programs where practitioners “adopt-a-student” and sponsor their attendance at professional meetings. Schools should also promote student attendance and participation at professional meetings.

Schools must work with community service groups to provide information and exposure to community service, then later to organize the projects (e.g., kids fairs, ADA, impaired pharmacy groups, adopt-a-highway). As noted in point number 8, schools need to take action to promote professionalism within their faculty. Deans, department chairs, and faculty affairs committees in all schools and colleges need to assess the level of professionalism displayed by faculty in teaching opportunities and extracurricular activities. The Council of Faculties of AACP must make sure issues get addressed at future meetings. Specific suggestions include:

1. Recognize that ethics in teaching spills over into ethics in pharmacy practice (e.g., tolerating cheating and/or reusing the same exams send messages about ethics in general).
2. Develop a checklist of desired professional activities and lessons for students to experience during their academic training; faculty must work together and communicate to ensure that the checklist is covered.
3. Encourage faculty/administration to continue to support student professional activities (e.g., scheduling around exams when possible); ensure that students understand their responsibility in this process and understand choices and consequences.

PRACTICE ISSUES

The final phase of pharmacy education involves interactions in actual practice. Addressing this area is important since student professionalism is influenced by the attitudes and values of preceptors. In order to reinforce professionally oriented values, the Task Force recommends that the following tasks be completed:

1. Schools should conduct preceptor training programs which incorporate professionalism and other issues discussed in this report.
2. Schools should develop “professional advisory committees” composed of identified pharmacy leaders from the state who could provide significant influence on other practitioners in the state regarding the issue of professionalism.
3. Schools should develop preceptor professionalism evaluations to make preceptors more accountable for their actions. For example, does the preceptor show empathy towards others; does the preceptor possess a strong sense of citizenship? Does the preceptor follow laws governing the practice of pharmacy?
4. Schools should develop preceptor portfolios for review by externship coordinators (i.e., listing professional activities over the past five years). These could be made available to students for review when selecting rotation sites and for preceptor development.
5. Schools should develop preceptor awards to be given to individuals who exemplify professionalism and who instill professionalism in their students.

The Task Force recommends that Deans, state association executives, and appropriate curriculum or experiential learning committees in schools and colleges consider these recommendations. The Experiential Learning SIG of AACP must also address these issues at future meetings.

The preceptor professionalism award would be similar to preceptor of the year award, but would not replace it. It could be sponsored/administered by either AACP or AACP/APhA jointly. Students could nominate candidates and a panel at the school could select the recipient. The recipient would be asked to present a seminar discussing a topic related to professionalization of students to the faculty and other preceptors at that school.

FUTURE ISSUES

The Task Force recommends that AACP, APhA and other organizations designate professionalism as an “area of emphasis” for future grant solicitations which evaluate pharmacy practice and education. Many questions exist that could be addressed in future studies including:

1. Where are our schools and colleges in terms of developing professionalism?
2. Do existing environments in some practices affect the professionalism of practitioners and the pharmacy practice overall?

Am. J. Pharm. Educ., 60, 26S-28S(1996); received 8/20/96.

APPENDIX A. TASK FORCE MEMBERS

Faculty
Robert Beardsley, Maryland, Co-chair
Katherine Knapp, Pacific
Michael McKenzie, Florida
George Spratto, West Virginia
Theodore Tong, Arizona
Mark Boesen, AACP staff

Students
Josh Benner, Drake, Co-Chair
Richard Alter, Rutgers
Kyle Kilchrist, Texas Southern
Malt Palmgren, Nova
Krissy Preston, Samford
Jan Hinkle, ASP Staff

Original Student Members
Tracy Allen, Maryland
John Bittinger, Washington
Mark Matsuki, Midwestern
Todd Sorensen, Minnesota
Sandra Varela, New Mexico