Pharmacy and History: The Right Prescription for an Uncertain Future

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PROLOGUE
This article is about my experience in trying to show pharmacy students the relevance of history to their chosen profession. It also constitutes the opening lecture to a course we teach called Cultural Heritage. The course is really about life, survival, and discovering one’s identity and place in the postmodern world. The course is also about showing students that pharmacy is both an art and a science with deep historical roots in both fields to help them keep the current changes in health care in long-term perspective.

“There are obviously two educations. One should teach us how to make a living and the other how to live” (1)
James Truslow Adams

INTRODUCTION
The impetus for writing this piece derives from three sources: William Zellmer’s lecture “Searching for the Soul of Pharmacy,” (2) Historian David R. McCullough’s lecture “The Strength of History,” (3) and my own experience in endeavoring to show my pharmacy students the relevance of history to their chosen profession. Although rapidly changing market conditions in health care have dramatically impacted pharmacists, there is a rich and proud heritage that can improve the profession’s ability to adapt to change and still remain human. The salient feature of pharmacy that has endured over time is its practitioners’ strong commitment to patient care and to the art of medicine. Historically, pharmacists have been masters at recognizing that to remain effective they must remain human to inspire and to retain the trust of their patients. With the advent of HMO patient satisfaction surveys, public ratings of hospital effectiveness, and the development of complementary care it seems that “caring” about patients has earned some renewed resonance as a market value in health care.

It is not news to state that with the demise of independent pharmacies falling victim to managed-care conglomerates, retail chains, and third party-payers, most of our students will not own their own pharmacies. Many will be corporate employees who will need to become more broadly educated so they can become multicontextual and operate in a rapidly changing health-care environment that is already highly competitive. Times of transition and rapid change present ideal opportunities for learning. The best defense against becoming irrelevant in the 21st century economy is to be broadly educated and highly educable. The following is the opening lecture to a course we teach called Cultural Heritage which is an

1Assistant Professor of History.
interdisciplinary humanities course that provides students with a broad knowledge base and with skills that are evaluated according to an ability-based outcomes model. The course is really about life, survival, and discovering one’s own identity and place in the postmodern world as a human being. The outcomes of the course include: critical thinking, communication, historical and cultural consciousness, aesthetic sensitivity, self and social awareness, valuing, citizenship, and self-learning abilities. Indeed, the adage “fortune favors the prepared mind” is perhaps more true now than it has ever been. As William Zellmer reminds us, “People want and need pharmacists with those characteristics-pharmacists with soul.”(4)

INTRODUCTORY LECTURE TO CULTURAL HERITAGE

What do Dante, Amerigo Vespucci, Isaac Newton, Benjamin Franklin, John Keats, Henrik Ibsen, and Hubert Humphrey share in common? They were all certainly distinguished leaders in their respective fields and eras. Although they lived at different times in different places they shared a common heritage in being pharmacists and also have earned a place in our collective memory we call “history” for their shared experiences. Although they lived before us, why limit ourselves to our narrow history made exclusively for pharmacists, historians, or accountants. History, present, and future are collective experiences we all share.

Here are the top ten reasons why you should take Cultural Heritage.

10. Outcomes, outcomes, outcomes!
   Cultural Heritage deals with significant outcomes that employers are seeking including: critical thinking, communication, historical and cultural consciousness, aesthetic sensitivity, self and social awareness, valuing, citizenship, and self-learning abilities.

9. Because you will not live long enough to repeat all the mistakes that have been made in history.
   Philip Wylie reminds us, “Ignorance is not bliss—it is oblivion.”(5) Understanding history means gaining instant experience. Youth and experience form a highly marketable graduate. Of the 20 billion people who have lived before us, why limit ourselves to our narrow biological allotment of time when there are so many interesting people to know and learn from?

8. So you know what to do and how to get the most from a visit to a museum, a play, or the symphony.
   One hundred years ago only the scions of the elite had the privilege of attaining a college education and access to high culture. Today, our cultural heritage belongs to anyone willing to open their mind in order to collect and appreciate that unique inheritance. Sister Wendy Beckett has observed, “I look forward to the day when it will dawn upon everybody that they can have odysseys and Grand Tours and share the fruits of the world. The capacity to see, to open up the vision of reality that an artist offers, is innate in all of us.” (6)

7. So you will know how to answer your children’s questions, or at least know where to look up the answers.
   At some point in life we are all teachers of something. For example, every parent is their child’s most important teacher. Similarly, every pharmacist should be their patient’s drug educator.

6. So you can read and appreciate the Sunday newspaper.
   Ralph Waldo Emerson observed, “Tis the good reader that makes a good book.”(7) There is more information contained in a Sunday newspaper than a PhD had to know all their lives 100 years ago.

5. So you will be multicontextual and will be flexible enough to have the basic professional skills to thrive no matter what happens in the future marketplace.

4. Because pharmacists have a rich and proud heritage they share with others as we all travel through history together.
   Everything relates to the human condition. There is no narrow history made exclusively for pharmacists, historians, or accountants. History, present, and future are collective experiences we all share.

3. Because pharmacists never know who their next patients are going to be or how they are going to relate to them in any given encounter.
   History like pharmacy is about caring for and about people. It is about searching for answers and seeking truth. In these pursuits we bring out the best in ourselves.

2. Because earning a college degree means attaining a high level of intellectual, cultural, and emotional literacy.

1. The hallmark of a professional is someone who devotes his or her life to making other people’s lives better by knowing and caring about what happens to them.
   Professional fulfillment comes in serving others.

CONCLUSION

As Aristotle observed, “Education is the best provision for old age.”(8) As we enter the new millennium, broadly educated pharmacists will have the necessary technical and professional skills to adapt successfully to a rapidly changing global market. Upward mobility into management demands strong communication and personnel skills. Top management demands well-read professionals who can converse with a diverse group of people including board members, shareholders, employees, and patients. The acid test of any pharmacy program is when their graduates are able to attend social functions and are able to talk about more than just their jobs. Global multicontextuality will be the operative motif in the 21st century marketplace. The real final exam for our students will be survival and success in confronting their future challenges.


References
(8) Ibid., p.5.