**Ethics Education for Contemporary Clinical Pharmacy Practice: A Review**

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**Abstract**

The paradigm shift to patient-oriented pharmacy practice model has resulted in dramatic increases in the number and variety of ethical dilemmas and other problems that confront pharmacists in their routine practices. However, ethical problems go undetected by many pharmacists or they fail to act to address them accordingly. In this regard, there is a huge need for the sound educational preparation of future pharmacists before they are faced with an urgent decision. This brought new interest and urgency for pharmacy ethics to be adequately taught in our schools and colleges of pharmacy, especially at the undergraduate and professional levels, so that future pharmacists can begin their professional careers with adequate ethical knowledge, skills, competencies and experience to handle ethical dimension of the contemporary patient-oriented pharmacy practice.

**Keywords:** Clinical Pharmacy, Pharmacy Education, Pharmacy Ethics, Pharmacy Practice

**Introduction**

Pharmacy ethics has traditionally held a very small place in the scheme of pharmaceutical education, only relegated to formal talk and sharing of copies of Code of Ethics for pharmacists to yet to be inducted pharmacists on the eve of their induction (1). However, previous studies appeared to cast doubt on the relevance of a pharmacy code (2,3). Pharmacists often struggled to describe ethical situations and this has been demonstrated in poverty of ethical explication (4). Though pharmacy is not usually involved in some of the more high profile ethical issues that arise in the medicine such as ethical concerns about conjoined twins, transplantation and the pre-selection of embryos to eradicate genetic diseases, in vitro fertilization, and gender selection among others (4). This may have led to the neglect of ethical concern for pharmacists in relation to more dramatic areas of healthcare such as medicine. Because pharmacists now have close interactions with patients and are considered as an indispensable group of healthcare providers, ethics in pharmacy practice seem to be as important as medicine. The problem of legal liability, actual and imagined affects the actions of physicians and pharmacists as each tries to maximize patient care and minimized legal liability.

In comparison with medicine, relatively little research has considered ethical concerns in pharmacy despite the paradigm shift to pharmaceutical care with an increasingly important ethical dimension, thereby highlighting the need for a refocusing on the ethical dimension of the pharmacist’s new patient-centred role and on sound ethical education to prepare him for that role.

**Pharmacy Ethics Education**

Fundamentally, a pharmacy graduate is required to able to recognize ethical dilemmas in healthcare and science and understands ways in which these might be managed by healthcare professionals in the light of relevant law (5). The Accreditation Council for Pharmacy Education (ACPE) states that “the college or school of pharmacy must ensure that the curriculum fosters the development of professional judgment and a commitment to uphold ethical standards and abide by practice regulations” (6). Similarly, the Center for the Advancement of Pharmaceutical Education (CAPE) requires that “pharmaceutical care be provided based upon sound therapeutic principles and evidence-based data, taking into account relevant legal, ethical, social, economic, and professional issues” (7). Furthermore, the General Pharmaceutical Council (GPhC), the accrediting body for the master of pharmacy (MPharm) degree programme in the UK, requires “pharmacy students to recognize ethical dilemmas and respond in accordance with relevant codes of conduct and behaviour” (8). Hence, ethics should be a critical part of pharmacy curricula around the world to equip future pharmacists with ethical knowledge and competencies for the real-world practice.

Disappointedly, the undergraduate/professional pharmacy ethics education in most part of the world predominantly deals with the legal aspect of the profession/practice with pharmacy ethics receiving far less coverage in the curriculum.Additionally,pharmacy law and ethics are usually combined as a single course taught didactically.

In pharmacy practice, law and ethics share many similar characteristics while fulfilling separate, but occasionally overlapping functions in regulating pharmacist’s behaviour (9). However, the question demanding for an answer is: are law and ethics only meaningfully understood together? This combination has created room for ethical issues to be entwined with legal issues. Without a doubt, students often will become confused in trying to differentiate between legal and ethical principles when deciding what type of conduct is mandated by law or expected. In order to address this shortcoming, a model for pharmacy ethics education is proposed.

**A Model for Pharmacy Ethics Education**

The goal of ethics education is to provide ethical knowledge, skills and competencies; this must be kept in mind when the content of ethics education syllabus is determined. Therefore, a standalone pharmacy ethics course is proposed to make room for a well-developed pharmacy ethics course with deeper contents and diverse mode of delivery that will ensure the ethical development of future pharmacists. Since, the skill in question here is that of critical ethical thinking, part of the content must be ethical theory balanced by laboratory experience such as the involvement of students in concrete ethical problems so that the skills of ethical thought may be learned. The analogy with the teaching of science indicates that models for ethics education should include both a theoretical and a practical component in the form of case debate, case discussion, small group discussion and team-based learning. This innovative strategy will not only enrich pharmacy students’ professional, ethical, and even cultural perspectives.

**Conclusion**

Currently, the undergraduate/professional pharmacy education in most part of the world predominantly deals with the legal aspect of the profession/practice compared with ethical aspects. Therefore, improving pharmacy ethics education by adopting a standalone pharmacy ethics course is highly critical to providing the best pharmaceutical care and making sound ethical clinical decisions in critical situations. A well developed, culturally adapted standalone pharmacy ethics syllabus is highly recommended to overcome the traditional dominance of law in the existing pharmacy law and ethics single course of most schools and colleges of pharmacy.

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