

LETTERS TO EDITOR

"I have read with interest the Note on Revamping Education for B.Pharm course to regain their employment opportunities written by Dr. Jayant B Dave and published in Pharma Times (Vol 45, No.03, March 2013 issue). I congratulate Dr. Dave for making an attempt in the right earnest. I agree with him that Pharmacy leadership have sacrificed quality over quantity. We have also introduced a number of pharmacy courses like diploma, degree, postgraduate in various specialities, pharm-D course, apparently for a small applied sector and with no clear objectives. The education and training of the professional aspects are simply ignored even at the diploma level. It appears that the regulatory authorities have simply ignored their responsibility and have nourished the Licence-Raj to open and run a pharmacy institute by the entrepreneur as a business proposition and thereby reducing the status and responsibilities of the head of an professional institute.

Let us appreciate and understand that there are two main opportunities for the pharmacists i.e. one for as a professional pharmacist, and the other as a technical staff/engineer in pharma industry and related avenues. You will agree and appreciate that pharmacy education has failed to meet the requirements of both these sectors.

It is a well-known fact that a product will sell because of its utility. This is true in education as well. Our graduates will be rewarded only if they are of some use or able to contribute their knowledge to the system or develop alternate and better approach to the system. The professional pharmacist will get recognition and status if their role is helpful to the public in the long run. Let it be appreciated the protection of the professional status by an Act is not enough. Rather we have not availed of this opportunity though provided under the Pharmacy Act. The professional associations are giving sympathy only and striving for their existence and status amongst themselves.

The problem of unemployment or under utilisation of the products of various pharmacy educational programs is a serious one and needs an immediate attention and solution. We need to reduce the number of courses, upgrade the B.Pharm course so that it earns its recognition and status as a professional course and a graduate should become the head of the academic institute. The higher and additional courses should meet the demand of a particular/specific field and not treated as a general qualification. The matter is open for further discussion.

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There are solutions to the predicament faced by Pharmacy graduates – but can they be implemented?

This has reference to the article by Dr. Jayant B. Dave. "Is revamping education a solution to the predicament faced by Pharmacy graduates?"

It was satisfying to go through the contents of this article that deals with the issue of unemployment of Pharmacy graduates and postgraduates. Regulation of quality and quantity of Pharmacy education and raising the performance bar is the solution generally given by most of our Academic advisors. However, the problem of unemployment shall sustain in our country even if attempts are made to raise the quality of Pharmacy education to International standards.

Recently, the number of Pharmacy Institutions have mushroomed to such an extent that the number of students that graduate outsize the number of job opportunities available. The reason for not getting a suitable job can also be attributed to the fact the fresh graduates do not have the expertise in the required field. However Industry experts opine that if the students have potential they can be given the required training after employment.

The question that then arises is; Is there a sufficient job market in our country to match the number of graduates and postgraduates? If no, can the job market be created?

As mentioned by the author, Revamping education is definitely an option. Different Universities across the country take up this aspect and the curriculum is revamped at regular intervals keeping in mind what industries look for. However the main hurdle is that Pharmacy graduates face competition from graduates from parallel streams and direct requirement of Pharmacists by Industries is limited. Specialization at undergraduate level may be considered but even the fate of postgraduates with specialization is disheartening. Majority of postgraduates consider Academics as an option due to lack of offers from industries. Introducing compulsory apprenticeship for graduates for a minimum period of six months at the end of the last semester as a part of graduation requirement can be considered. With this the students will be equipped with better knowledge and there will be realization on the part of the students about their areas of interest. This will also help the industries to select the best out of the prospective pool of talent. Pharmacy Council should take up the responsibility of

sensitizing the industries to consider training of the students to bridge the gap in terms of lack of expertise and thus make them employable.

The second option which the author has mentioned was inducting Pharmacists in health care team. This was taken as the matter of discussion in several forums with different authorities wherein it was deliberated but without any outcome. We have been coming across several news items with respect to the colleges celebrating National Pharmacy week and other campaigns with the theme "Role of Pharmacist in community health care" but they have no impact on the systems prevailing. Apart from dispensing and managing drug stores, a pharmacist has an insignificant role to play in hospitals. Most of the students choose pharmacy as an option after medicine as they are made to believe that pharmacists have a very crucial role to play as far as patient health is concerned.

There is definitely a good move by the respective authorities to introduce course like M. Pharm. in Pharmacy Practice and integrated courses like Pharm. D. and Masters in Pharmacy Management (MPM). However there is no surety about enough job avenues for these degree holders. Its time for the Government to realize that Pharmacists should be given due recognition and reform the policies accordingly. As rightly mentioned by the author, students should be given compulsory internship in the hospitals to impart clinical knowledge and create jobs for them as Hospital pharmacists with suitable compensation. Physicians can team up with Pharmacists and utilize their knowledge in rational drug therapy through effective prescription.

It is a request on behalf of all the Pharmacy Professionals to the concerned authorities to bring this to reality and help in enhancing the value of Pharmacy as a career. Pharmacy is considered as a noble profession elsewhere in the world but in India upliftment of face of Pharmacy profession is absolutely essential and this can be done by creating professionally rewarding employment avenues for the Pharmacists.

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