LETTERS

The Need for a National Level Competency or Licensing Examination for the Doctor of Pharmacy Degree in India

To The Editor. The Pharmacy Council of India (PCI) introduced the doctor of pharmacy (PharmD) degree program in 2008 with the goals of improving patient care and providing pharmacy education programs in India that included much needed clinical practice experience.¹ The PharmD degree in India is available in 2 formats: a straight 6-year program after the completion of year 12 in high school and a 3-year postbaccalaureate degree program after completion of the traditional 4-year bachelor of pharmacy degree program.

Initially, only a few pharmacy colleges in India offered the PharmD degree program after the PCI had given the go-ahead. In recent years, the number of colleges offering the PharmD degree has increased exponentially.² Some of these colleges are affiliated with government universities while others are affiliated with private universities. While the PCI provides a uniform PharmD degree program syllabus for all pharmacy colleges in India to follow, the methods for evaluating competency of PharmD program graduates differ across these institutions.

Some of these colleges are prestigious institutions that provide their students with a strong learning infrastructure and have their own hospitals to provide their PharmD degree students with hands-on clinical training. Newer pharmacy colleges have experienced significant challenges to providing an effective learning environment for their students. Because the healthcare field is one where the quality of its providers is of utmost importance for the greater welfare of the society, it is imperative that the standards for PharmD degree programs of colleges throughout India are comparable.

Consequently, India needs a mandatory national-level PharmD degree competency licensing examination, which all PharmD program graduates must pass to practice

pharmacy in India. This competency examination may be taken as soon as the student graduates with a PharmD degree before they register with the PCI. Passing this examination would then become mandatory for registration. There could be 2 parts to this proposed examination: theory and practical (clinical). The theory examination could be conducted by the PCI in the form of an online multiple-choice examination. The format of the licensing examination could be tailored along the lines of the NAPLEX examination³ with a suitable fee charged to each candidate taking it.

The advantages and benefits of this system are manifold. It could provide uniform standards for PharmD program graduates from various universities. Modeling these examinations along the lines of the NAPLEX could provide equivalence between the PharmD degree earned in India and that earned in advanced pharmacy education nations like the United States, Canada, United Kingdom, Australia, etc. This would also go a long way in drastically improving the quality of the PharmD program in India. A national level licensing examination would serve as the NAPLEX equivalent in India, which means that any foreign PharmD program graduate who decides to practice in India would be required to pass this examination.

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