VIEWPOINTS

Turning the World of Pharmacy Education into a Global Community Through Sharing

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Barriers to delivering quality pharmacy education in developing countries have been identified as limited infrastructure, access to teaching resources, academic staff development, and research capacity.¹ In 2010, the International Pharmaceutical Federation (FIP) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) signed an agreement to develop a FIP UNESCO-UNITWIN Global Pharmacy Education Development (GPhED) program. The GPhED network strives to raise the standard of education globally and incorporate best practices through shared resources, expertise, and experience. UNESCO and FIP consider one of the essential factors favoring development in the field of professional competence the exchange of experience and knowledge between universities and other learning institutions. Additionally, collaborative practice by university teachers, researchers, and administrators from different regions across the world could benefit the entire professional community.

The aims of the FIP UNESCO-UNITWIN program are global higher education and its development, with a special interest in African nations and low-income countries, empowerment of women as pharmaceutical scientists and academics, sustainable health workforce development, academic capacity building, quality assurance, and accreditation standards, which are all compatible with the overarching aims of UNESCO.^{2,3} Objectives of the program include promotion of an integrated system of research, training, information, and documentation in the field of pharmacy education through “Centres of Excellence,” which will facilitate intra-regional cooperation.

Sharing in all areas is the key and to this end the GPhED program is currently developing three areas of activity that focus on sharing of teaching and learning

resources, pharmaceutical education expertise and experience, and research capacity.

Resource sharing within the program is being facilitated through SABER (Sharing and Building Educational Resources), an online platform (www.saber.monash.edu) from which resources can be downloaded, used, and shared internationally between academic institutions to improve teaching and learning. Enhanced pharmacy education creates better pharmacists, but creating high-quality student learning resources takes time and money. Sharing educational resources makes sense so students can benefit and learn more, especially in a global profession such as pharmacy where teaching needs are often similar. Sharing and collaborating creates and strengthens partnerships based on goodwill and a shared commitment to educational excellence. The SABER platform is a place to share, discover, acquire, and re-purpose resources for pharmacy education. It also encourages the collaborative creation of new content. SABER is available to educators in pharmacy schools around the world, hosting quality-assured educational resources and providing a trustworthy source of relevant and current material. Being multi-tiered, it allows various access levels for a broad range of users.

SABER’s intuitive interface allows users to quickly find existing assets, and up-to-date social-networking tools let them build peer networks to adapt resources and create new material. The site is administered by Monash University on behalf of the GPhED network and is accessible to all for free. Under a Creative Commons license, SABER enables academics anywhere in the world to share something as simple as an image or a PowerPoint presentation, to large purpose-designed teaching programs in areas relating to pharmacy and pharmaceutical science. The success of SABER depends on academics contributing resources they have developed to share via the database.

Another important component in the GPhED program is the formation of the African Centre of Excellence in Pharmacy Education. Ideally, the Centre will facilitate

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the sharing of ideas, skills, resources, and good practice, including staff exchange for skills and capacity building. The Centre will provide a forum for discussion and debate on trends and developments in pharmacy education, facilitated by network partners, including NGOs and professional agencies, and coordinated by the founding partners. Africa was chosen to establish the first FIP UNESCO-UNITWIN Centre of Excellence because the region is in great need of a pharmacy workforce and lacks educational resources for universities.⁴

A recent meeting of the 5 founding partner countries – Ghana, Namibia, Nigeria, Uganda and Zambia – was held in Lusaka, Zambia to determine the future activities of the Centre. Five domains for the Centre of Excellence were determined (communication, capability, quality, innovation, and clinical). Each founding partner agreed to take the lead in one of these domains and coordinate projects or activities within them. The founding partners developed and agreed to a communications strategy and will contribute to advocacy, local network building, and communications to ensure the wider success of the Centre of Excellence. Proposed projects of the Centre include a survey of African colleges and schools of pharmacy to establish a database of academic capacity and expertise to facilitate intra-regional sharing of expertise through a visiting academic program. Another project is the development of a “Lab-box” of basic laboratory equipment to improve students’ ability to undertake laboratory experiments to support their learning of basic science concepts. The Centre of Excellence will invite additional countries to become part of the centre to expand its activities and provide a broader base of communication and support in the region. Centre of Excellence activities will also seek to promote gender equality and empowerment for women

academics and scientists in collaborative research and policy development.

The GPhED hopes to foster international collaborative research by having prospective research students complete a higher degree in their home university in Africa under the guidance of a local supervisor and an experienced international researcher with expertise in the chosen research area. The hope is that the arrangement of shared supervision will enable collaboration in policy synthesis and strategic development, with a focus on international development issues and sustainable practitioner development policies. Public health or service delivery projects are favored by the African universities due to the limited laboratory facilities available, but such projects will contribute relevant health data in the country and increase the capacity for improved health programs and delivery of pharmacy services.

The FIP UNESCO-UNITWIN Global Pharmacy Education Development network is in the nascent stages of development, but through the goodwill, enthusiasm, and support of academics across the globe, sharing educational resources, expertise, and experience through such networks will facilitate the provision of quality pharmacy education in developing countries.

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