

Professionalism is a lifelong commitment

APhA–ASP seeks to increase awareness

By Andrew P. Traynor and Heather R. Ferguson

Pharmacy has experienced many changes in the 150 years since a group of creative, innovative, and proud pharmacists first gathered in Philadelphia to create a national professional society of pharmacists. It was the goal of these pharmacists to maintain the viability of, and address the issues facing, the profession. Since that time, the profession has changed from one focused on managing the production of drugs to one primarily concerned with the safe, effective, and appropriate use of medications and the provision of enhanced pharmacy services to patients. Although the practice of pharmacy has changed, the fact that pharmacists are professionals has remained the same.

Pharmacy, like many other professions, is continuously evolving to meet the needs of the public it serves. Pharmacists are and will always remain professionals and they must work to instill the profession's attitudes and values in students who, as pharmacists, will be responsible for maintaining the continuity of pharmacy as a profession.

A profession, not just an occupation

The importance of pharmacy students' professional development has been long recognized as a key issue in pharmacy education. A 5-year commitment by the Task Force on Professionalism resulted in publication of the *White Paper on Pharmacy Student Professionalism*, in the January/February 2000 issue of *Journal of the American Pharmaceutical Association*. Drafted by APhA–ASP and the American Association of Colleges of Pharmacy Council of Deans, the white paper focuses on raising awareness and leading action on developing professionalism among pharmacy students. This paper looks at the definitions of professionalism and challenges in professional development and makes recommendations for students, educators, and practitioners. The white paper calls for the profession to recommit itself to enhancing the professional development of students.



Traynor

The white paper defines “professional socialization” as “the process of inculcating a profession’s attitudes, values, and behaviors in a professional.” It goes on to state that the “goal of professional socialization is to develop professionalism.”

Professional socialization begins when students first apply to one of the nation’s 84 colleges of pharmacy. It is at this time that they make the decision to become a professional. Students reaffirm their commitment on the first day of orientation when they dedicate themselves to acquiring the knowledge and skills necessary to practice pharmacy. Throughout their education, students commit to constantly improving their knowledge for the benefit of their patients.

Pharmacists devote themselves to providing service to their communities. When providing these services, they are expected to make conscientious, ethical decisions and to be responsible for their work. Students must take the initiative to learn and understand the characteristics that make pharmacy a profession and not merely an occupation. Professionalism is a lifelong commitment that pharmacists must continually practice and develop.



Ferguson

Has the pharmacist shortage weakened professionalism?

Throughout the country, print and television media have drawn attention to the pharmacist shortage. When students apply to pharmacy school, what are their intentions? Today, most students enter pharmacy school hoping to serve the public and improve health care outcomes, but each student has at least one classmate who entered pharmacy school with the intention to strike it rich. A pharmacist shortage means big money, but this money has the potential to distract students from their true reason for choosing pharmacy as a profession.

The pharmacist shortage has also increased the workload of practicing pharmacists. Increased workloads for pharmacists

servicing as preceptors and mentors have the potential to reduce the time they can give and lower the quality of the guidance they offer. So, students, excited about the opportunity to implement innovative services as they begin rotations, often encounter resistance from these overburdened pharmacists. Some of these pharmacists have developed a jaded perception of professionalism due to the current stresses in their practice environment.

This is something pharmacy students may encounter as they make the transition from the classroom to practice. Only through the continuous development of professional attitudes will students acquire the skills necessary to overcome these challenges.

Professionalism activities encouraged

Keeping in mind the white paper's assertion that the goal of professional socialization is to develop professionalism, the 2002–2003 APhA–ASP Executive Committee renewed its efforts to increase the awareness of professionalism in pharmacy and actively promote professional development for Academy members.

Defining 'professional'

Professional: A member of a profession who displays the following 10 traits:

1. Knowledge and skills of a profession.
2. Commitment to self-improvement of skills and knowledge.
3. Service orientation.
4. Pride in the profession.
5. Covenantal relationship with the client.
6. Creativity and innovation.
7. Conscience and trustworthiness.
8. Accountability for his or her work.
9. Ethically sound decision making.
10. Leadership.

Professionalism: The active demonstration of the traits of a professional.

Professional socialization (professionalization): The process of inculcating a profession's attitudes, values, and behaviors in a professional. The goal of professional socialization is to develop professionalism, as defined by the 10 character traits above.



PHOTO BY MITCH ROTHOLZ

Graduates of the 2002 APhA Summer Leadership Institute pose in white labcoats.

The Executive Committee encourages activities such as the formation of professionalism committees consisting of pharmacy students and faculty members devoted solely to the professionalization of pharmacy students. The Executive Committee also encourages the planning and organizing of white coat ceremonies, pinning ceremonies, and mentoring opportunities, as well as promoting classroom civility, honor codes, and conduct that fosters professionalism in schools and colleges of pharmacy. It is our hope that the results of these professionalism initiatives will spread to both students and practitioners.

Examples of professionalism

At the University of Georgia College of Pharmacy, the incoming class participates in a white coat ceremony that excites and encourages them as they begin their professional journey in pharmacy. Before they begin their fourth professional year and embark on rotations, students attend a pinning ceremony that signifies the last step that they must take before they become practitioners.

Recently, the University of Washington School of Pharmacy implemented a new program in which the incoming class is required to develop its own oath of professionalism. This oath will inform and guide their activities throughout their years of pharmacy school. As a reminder of their commitment, this oath of professionalism will be read at their graduation.

Students and faculty members at University of Minnesota College of Pharmacy have banded together to address professionalism issues. The group applied to the University Central Council to form an Ad Hoc Committee on Professionalism. The committee consists of four faculty members and four pharmacy students, one student representative from each class. The committee has held luncheons with a random selection of

Professionalism continued on page 14

students to talk about issues and discuss proposed courses of action. One proposal being seriously considered is holding professional development colloquia in combination with the curriculum. Recognizing that the development of professionalism as an evolutionary process, these colloquia will address specific areas of professionalism, such as civility, professional organizations, the recognition of colleagues, professional responsibilities, professional awareness, contemporary issues in pharmacy literature, expectations during externships and rotations, maintaining professionalism, and mentoring, for each class. This committee will explore other options for additional programming in the near future.

University of Minnesota Associate Dean Ron Hadsall stated: "As pharmacy educators, we should focus on knowledge, practices, and attitudes in pharmacy. Right now, we place the majority of our efforts on knowledge and practice. We need to place emphasis on attitudes toward pharmacy."

Active role required

Pharmacy professionals are people who take the initiative to develop their skills and dedicate themselves to learning from and communicating with their peers. They join professional associations and actively participate in advocacy for their profession. Professionals strive to be creative and innovative in their profession. They take on leadership roles in both the profession of pharmacy and the provision of care to patients. Above all, professionals take pride in their profession. It is the obligation of pharmacy educators and pharmacy students to develop the characteristics and values necessary to become professionals and help instill them into others.

APhA-ASP has always worked to supplement these obligations and foster student development and will continue to do so in the years to come. Together, pharmacy students must take an active role in changing the attitudes of their peers who have yet to embrace professionalism.

Andrew P. Traynor is a third-year PharmD candidate at the University of Minnesota College of Pharmacy and 2002-2003 APhA-ASP president-elect. Heather R. Ferguson, is a fourth-year PharmD candidate at the University of Georgia College of Pharmacy and 2002-2003 APhA-ASP Speaker of the House.

The Pledge of Professionalism

As a student of pharmacy, I believe there is a need to build and reinforce a professional identity founded on integrity, ethical behavior, and honor. This development, a vital process in my education, will help to ensure that I am true to the professional relationship I establish between myself and society as I become a member of the pharmacy community. Integrity will be an essential part of my everyday life, and I will pursue all academic and professional endeavors with honesty and commitment to service.

To accomplish this goal of professional development, as a student of pharmacy I will:

- A. DEVELOP a sense of loyalty and duty to the profession by contributing to the well-being of others and by enthusiastically accepting responsibility and accountability for membership in the profession.
- B. FOSTER professional competency through lifelong learning. I will strive for high ideals, teamwork, and unity within the profession in order to provide optimal patient care.
- C. SUPPORT my colleagues by actively encouraging personal commitment to the Oath of a Pharmacist and the Code of Ethics for Pharmacists as set forth by the profession.
- D. DEDICATE my life and practice to excellence. This will require an ongoing reassessment of personal and professional values.
- E. MAINTAIN the highest ideals and professional attributes to ensure and facilitate the covenantal relationship required of the pharmaceutical caregiver.

The profession of pharmacy is one that demands adherence to a set of ethical principles. These high ideals are necessary to ensure the quality of care extended to the patients I serve. As a student of pharmacy, I believe this does not start with graduation; rather, it begins with my membership in this professional college community. Therefore, I will strive to uphold this pledge as I advance toward full membership in the profession.

I voluntarily make this pledge of professionalism.

Adapted from the University of Illinois College of Pharmacy's Pledge of Professionalism, 1993. Developed and adopted by APhA-ASP and the American Association of Colleges of Pharmacy Council of Deans Task Force on Professionalism on June 26, 1994.

Visit the  **pharmacist**.com
Career Center for Online Classified Ads
& Virtual Mentoring!