



REVIEW

**The role of pharmacists in developing countries:
 The current scenario in the United Arab Emirates**



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Abstract Pharmacy practice has passed several rounds of advancements over the past few years. It had changed the traditional positioning criteria of pharmacists as business people into patient-centered healthcare professionals. This worldwide shift is increasingly accumulating pressure on UAE pharmacists to turn up into better level of service providing accompanied with higher demand of inter-personal skills and intellectual capabilities. This can be accomplished through stressing the significance of continuing pharmacy education in basic sciences as well as social and administrative pharmacy techniques and its collaboration in elevating the quality of pharmacy practice in the UAE.

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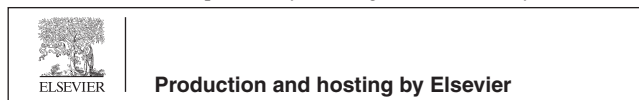
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1. Introduction

Over the last 20 years, pharmacists' role has transformed from product orientation services into patient centered services in many parts of the world (Anderson, 2005; Andrew, 2004; Anne et al., 2010). Within the context of practice change, most of the times there is a need for the pharmacist to interact with patients and their health service provider for optimizing the delivery of pharmaceutical care services. In order to effectively perform this role, other than strong knowledge in pharmacotherapy, new generation pharmacists also need to equip themselves in fields such as sociology, management, pharmaco-economics and psychology.

2. Spheres of pharmacy practice in UAE

There are four basic spheres for any person who desires to be a part of the profession in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). The first is to master the pharmaceutical sciences by acquiring the needed knowledge and intellectual capabilities (Wong, 2001; Christine, 2010). This can be gained through undergraduate pharmacy degree courses available at present in the UAE at 7 colleges: Ajman University of Science and Technology, Sharjah University, Gulf Medical University, Al-Ain University of Science and Technology, Dubai Pharmacy College, Ras Al-Khaimah Medical University, and Higher Colleges of Technology – Dubai Women College. Pharmacy education was first established in the UAE in the year 1992 by Dubai Pharmacy College which provided bachelor degree certificates to female students (DPC, 2013), and since then, many other colleges and universities started graduating a significant proportion of pharmacists per academic year needed to saturate the market domestically. However, Most of the registered pharmacists have acquired their undergraduate degrees from universities and colleges outside the country. This is due to the fact that most of the registered pharmacists in the U.A.E. are expatriates (Kheir et al., 2008).

The second sphere is the presence of a national association representing all pharmacy practitioners. Emirates Medical Association (EMA) and its specialized section namely Emirates Pharmacy Society (EPS) were a trial in the direction of promoting pharmacy practice, protecting the interests of its members and end-users, and encouraging the advancement of the pharmaceutical science (EMA, 2013). Nevertheless, its current role is restricted to providing certified continuous medical education (CME) credit hours required by the Ministry of Health (MOH) to renew most of the medical practitioners' licenses on yearly basis.

The third sphere relates to the professional code of conduct and ethics which guides all pharmacy practitioners. In 2001, MOH issued a guide booklet about the "Professional Code of Conduct for Primary Healthcare Staff" (MOH, 2001). It contained detailed information about the definition of ethics

for medical practitioners including pharmacists. A lot of information provided was stated in articles 16 and 17 in the UAE federal law number 4 of 1983 for the pharmaceutical professions and institutions (MOH, 1983).

The forth sphere of a learned profession is the stipulation by its practitioners of uniform professional services and advice to the patients. This includes supplying medicines to public, in addition to providing appropriate advice to patients during the dispensing and counseling process.

Pharmacy, as a solid science profession, was almost relying on its pharmacological, chemical, and pharmaceuticals scientific knowledge parts since old ages. Appearance of higher patients' expectations and development of the discipline of social and administrative pharmacy as a concept and applying it to reality brought to pharmacy practice several rounds of professional metamorphosis. As a result, pharmacy practice has been defined in a variety of ways.

3. A fast developing country

UAE is one of the Gulf Cooperation Council states in the Middle East region. It is a constitutional federation that was established on 2nd of December 1971 (Wikipedia, 2013). The UAE constitutes 7 Emirates; Abu Dhabi (the capital), Dubai, Sharjah, Ajman, Umm Al-Quwain, Ras Al-Khaimah, and Fujairah. It lies between Oman and Saudi Arabia, and has coastal borders on the Arabian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman (CIA, 2012). The UAE is a rich country and has gross domestic product (GDP), per capita, of around \$52,435 (UN, 2011). About one third of the GDP is gained through petroleum, oil, and gas (CIA, 2012). The UAE has a diverse and a fast expanding population which was estimated to break the mark of 8 million in 2010. However, UAE nationals are considerably few compared to expatriates (non-citizens) who constitute approximately 88.5% of the total population (NBS, 2010). Due to this reason, most of the work force in the UAE is made up of expatriates; who mostly come from other Arab countries, Iran, South East and South Asia (particularly from India, Pakistan, and Philippines).

The UAE has an expenditure on healthcare of about 2.8% of the GDP (WHO, 2012). This relatively low percentage can be justified by the fact that the government only spends on UAE citizens in terms of delivering healthcare services in addition to the country's high income.

Demands on healthcare services are continuously expanding in the country due to the dramatic influx of expatriates. This instigated the government to establish diverse, publicly-funded healthcare services by investing in private health sector and was partly a reason to form 2 semi-centralized health authorities namely Health Authority of Abu Dhabi (HAAD) and Dubai Health Authority (DHA) in Abu Dhabi and Dubai respectively. These 2 new regulatory bodies are increasingly contributing in enriching the medical practicing environment

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