Why helping the public and the planet is important for pharmacy in the future

Beverley Lucas, Gill Hawksworth and Elizabeth Horncastle from the University of Bradford share their experience and reflections on developing an innovative workshop looking at education for sustainable development and the practical implications for future pharmacy practitioners.

As the sustainability agenda gains momentum, there is a need for pharmacists and a concept of responsible professionalism increasingly to become a focus for action, since there are implications for the education of practitioners of the future.

The University of Bradford is part of the Ecoversity programme that aims to embed the principles and practice of sustainable development across the institution and is actively engaged in addressing the challenges of sustainable development. The Bradford School of Pharmacy has been proactive in giving students the opportunity to debate topical issues that impinge upon professional practice and the thought-provoking article encouraging pharmacists to “help the public and the planet by engaging in sustainable development” provided further impetus for workshop development.

Pilot study
A three-staged pilot study was conducted over the academic year 2008/09. The first step was to undertake a literature review exploring ideas related to responsible professionalism within health care disciplines. An independent review of the curriculum also highlighted the potential at programme and modular level for incorporating education for sustainable development within pharmacy practice.

From this, the implementation stage concentrated on a professional practice module within the MPharm programme that sought to develop critical awareness of the social and political context relevant to pharmacy practice. We were fortunate to access the PharmacyHealthLink and Department of Health evidence-based resources (available from www.phlink.org.uk) as materials that we thought could be used to support directed learning activity for the purpose of student education. These leaflets and professional resources featured information and advice at the level of the individual, health care professional and community pharmacy perspectives. The directed learning exercises were designed to complement these levels of engagement, focusing on current and potential activities in looking after health, key factors and influences associated with sustainable development and the contribution of community pharmacy practice professionals in the sustainable development challenge.

The three-hour workshops were delivered to groups of 35 students and were facilitated by an academic and experienced community pharmacist. Students were also introduced to the Ecoversity staff, including a student ambassador with a major role in raising awareness and fostering student involvement. The workshops were evaluated using an anonymous scaled response questionnaire, with opportunities for qualitative comment and distributed after each session as part of a process evaluative approach.

Overall, students’ comments (during the workshops) and more formal evaluative data showed that they had found the sessions useful and thought provoking, and they supported the inclusion of education for sustainable development within the curriculum. The most useful points outlined in student feedback were the use of evidence-based resources, working in small groups with opportunities for collaborative learning and the chance to discuss sustainability in relation to pharmacy practice. We have grouped the following comments to illustrate student ideas and opinions related to these points.

The evidence-based resources introduced as part of the workshop captured the different structural levels of engagement. Of the first leaflet (“Healthy you, healthy planet”), students reported that “it gave us an idea of what information we are providing to patients with” and that “we could reflect on the information and the layout of the leaflet.”

The second leaflet (“Towards a healthier planet — guide to sustainable development”) introduced during the session was designed as a professional resource. One student’s comments, reflected on issues of professional responsibility: “The second leaflet was useful because I believe that as professionals we should inform people about how to save energy and save our planet.” Exploring the resources within the broader structural context of pharmacy, one student who was “having a look through the resources that are going to be available in pharmacies in the future” appreciated looking at the resources that would be available within practice.

The group work activities captured viewpoints such as “informal discussion was thought provoking and allowed sharing of good ideas”, “being able to have a look at different opinions from other people” with opportunities for debate, “group work sessions bringing in a lot of different perspectives” and “student collaboration”.

In terms of sustainability in practice, students related practical examples such as “ideas for how to improve sustainability in pharmacy”, “how to save energy in the pharmacy”, “involvement of the pharmacy in eco-friendly issues” and “steps to reduce CO2 footprint”. Others reflected on being a university student on a professional programme such as “Ecoversity-related to health care”. Another theme explored professional responsibilities such as “the role of pharmacists in the promotion of health” and individual responsibility and “what I can do as a pharmacist”.

Student suggestions for development
Student feedback also highlighted areas for workshop development including specific learning and teaching considerations related to the timing of sessions (too long), the need for more interactive materials (make it more visual) and strengthening relevance for professional practice (more practice examples). There were also a diverse range of general suggestions for future development that were
ffered learning and teaching strategy. The use of small group teaching may be the pre-
preparation for future practice roles, so the general education (ESD) and relate it within
debate topics such as education for sustain-
table development (ESD) and relate it within
the following learning points for considera-
Reflections
In reviewing the pilot study, we put forward
the following learning points for considera-
tion. First, students need the opportunity to
debate topics such as education for sustain-
able development (ESD) and relate it within
preparation for future practice roles, so the use of small group teaching may be the pre-
ferred learning and teaching strategy.
There is a need to provide a community
practice perspective within educational deliv-
ery in order for students to appreciate the
context and relevance for future professional
development. In line with the pharmacy
White Paper for England, the importance of
enhancing pharmacy’s contribution to health
and promotion of its potential to lead local
communities is helpful to consider when
preparing students for future practice oppor-
tunities.
Although community pharmacists have al-
ways had a clinical role, there have been con-
cerns around the rate of change and
associated lack of progress. If direction for
the future enhances clinical focus within
pharmacy, engaging in teaching and learning
activities such as the one we have outlined
provides students with opportunities to inte-
grate knowledge using practical application
to contribute towards providing holistic ap-
proaches to patient care.
The process of curricular review and de-
velopment of pedagogical approaches to pro-
vide educational preparation are also
important considerations of any new devel-
opment of pedagogical approaches to pro-

cision and relevance for future professional
practice (practitioners) is a key factor for suc-
cess. The importance of embedding ESD will
be relevant for preparing future pharmacists,
who will require an understanding of issues
aligned with roles and responsibilities. This is
now a pressing matter within the context of
primary professional responsibilities and plan-
nig for future health system scenarios (such as
those featured by Watson in a recent
Agenda article) that provide students with
further examples of relevance for pharmacy
practice.
In summary, this small scale activity is one
example of directed learning activity using
evidence-based resources within workshop-
facilitated sessions, but it is only the begin-
ing. The Bradford School of Pharmacy has
now scaled up this initiative to include all
pharmacy student groups (from year 1 of
their programmes) and post-registration pro-
vision. The evidence-based resources provide
information to help pharmacists play their
part in the sustainable development chal-

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