

ŠSSFD Position Paper: “Global Pharmacy Workforce: Preparing for the Next Decade”

The Students’ Section of the Slovenian Pharmaceutical Society (ŠSSFD) is the national association that represents numerous pharmacy students in Slovenia. ŠSSFD recognises the importance of adapting and developing our profession in a way that benefits the overall wellbeing of humankind. In order to include our students’ opinion as a basis for this document, we posed relevant questions about the topic and collected answers through a survey.

At the Faculty of Pharmacy, University of Ljubljana, the curriculum is shaped in a way that allows the students to recognise their abilities and focus on their interests in the final years of studies. In the 4th year we are given an option to choose either Design and Synthesis of Active Substances or Toxicological Chemistry, and then continue with Industrial or Clinical Pharmacy. Our education is rounded by completing a mandatory internship in a community or hospital pharmacy as stated in European Directive 2005/36/EC. In the past, some propositions were made to improve our curriculum by including clinical cases and pharmacotherapy in the subject Pharmacology. This is an important step especially for the future, as we believe the role of clinical pharmacists will become greater. This is further explained below.

The future brings new challenges for the pharmaceutical profession, which is especially prone to changes due to its interdisciplinarity. Digitalisation and automation are seen as great threats for many professions since robots can maintain routine work more successfully. However, this is not such a concern in the case of pharmacists. In pharmacies, (drugstores), people come to buy medicines and more importantly they seek advice from a healthcare professional. This consulting knowledge is our competitive advantage over every machine, as well as the empathy towards patients. We believe this will not change in the nearby future, quite the opposite; the ability to critically evaluate information will gain in value. Pharmacists will have more time for counselling, since automation will shorten medication dispensing process time. Similar logic holds for the pharmaceutical industry.

We believe our current curriculum provides the depth needed to be able to understand complex problems and gives us the ability to find sources needed for their solutions. However, in the future, it is important for our studies to adapt and focus more on newer technologies (eg. immunology, pharmacogenomics), which are evolving rapidly. It would be beneficial to give students the option to explore their preferred areas sooner and to give higher importance to elective courses. For example, someone interested in biotechnology could choose most of their courses in topics which best suit their future career, those who wish to work in community pharmacy would focus on pharmacology, pharmacotherapy and soft-skills classes, as proper communication skills are proven to be very beneficial in the patient - pharmacist relationship. Furthermore, our stance is that internships should be elective - a mandatory 6 month internship in a community pharmacy isn’t as beneficial for someone looking to work in drug development as an internship in a pharmaceutical company would be. However, this is a matter of a European Directive mentioned before, so changes must be made at European level. Ideally, students could choose between an internship in a hospital (clinical pharmacy), in a community pharmacy or in a pharmaceutical company/research laboratory (industrial pharmacy, development, biotechnology).

The next decade brings many new challenges, but with adequate changes in our curriculum and with a lifelong learning philosophy, the overall quality of healthcare will be improved.