

Community pharmacists: An expression of gratitude

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One of the main advantages of choosing to study pharmacy, is that it leads to a highly flexible profession, providing the graduate with multiple options to choose from. Switching from one career path to another is also relatively common in local practice. While working conditions are a prime contributor to the choice of career path, additional factors such as personality-job fit also play a very important part. In terms of work related personality, pharmacists working in different areas exhibit distinct traits.¹

A study conducted locally illustrated that when comparing major areas of practice, those whose primary career choice was community practice rated high in the trait of Personal Relations, demonstrating that they have faith and trust in people, are tolerant and understanding. These traits show that they are predisposed to caring.¹ Other significant traits in community pharmacists, but which also features prominently in all pharmacists, are those of Cautiousness and Responsibility. These individuals are persevering, determined and reliable; they consider matters very carefully before taking a decision and are not inclined to take chances or run risks. These traits are also very similar to those found in US pharmacists.²

While multiple career options are available, community pharmacy either as a primary or secondary occupation is still the most popular.³ Community pharmacists offer a sterling service to the community. Studies conducted locally have shown their commitment and dedication to their clients and comparative studies have also demonstrated that their practice is akin to their international colleagues.⁴

Community pharmacists practice in every town and village, they are integral members of their community and the vast majority not only know their patients but also entire families and extended families. This, coupled with the ease of access and relatively informal environment in which they practice make them instrumental in the delivery of patient care. Due to these factors and informal

conversation community pharmacists conduct a number of 'invisible' services, which may not have a clear definition and are most certainly not remunerated, yet these services rank as one of their most vital functions. Community pharmacists are very often the first port of call for patients, they are therefore able to guide individuals accordingly through advice, selection of appropriate medication or referral to the appropriate health care professional. At times, just listening and making the individual feel that his/her needs or situation is understood is a significant intervention.

Dispensing of medicines brings with it significant responsibilities, be they legal, ethical or in terms of patient care. Once again, most of these responsibilities may not be fully appreciated by those external to the profession. Striving to ensure that the medication is taken appropriately, identification of any cases of drug misadventure and monitoring of patients are but a few ways in which pharmacists contribute to their patients' safety and positive health outcomes on a daily basis.

Many pharmacists are also very actively engaged in public health activities and conduct campaigns to educate their clients, promote health and prevent disease. This is done in a rather personalised manner which promises to have a better impact.

Pharmacists find tremendous satisfaction from their interventions and interactions with patients. As with every other profession, at times, they find themselves in situations where they do not feel professionally respected and appreciated, yet they still provide the best possible service to their patients. In these circumstances pharmacists should be fully and publically supported. A show of support not only restores the pharmacists' confidence but also benefits the profession.

Community pharmacists should receive all the training and necessary support to continue to provide their sterling, yet often invisible, service to their community. They clearly respond to the needs of their

community as outlined by WHO's European health policy framework *Health 2020* and the strategic document *Priorities for health system strengthening in the WHO European Region 2015-2020: walking the talk on people centeredness*.^{5,6} The Malta College of Pharmacy Practice endeavours to support pharmacists to offer even more innovative services through the provision of Continuing Professional Development programmes.

The Malta College of Pharmacy Practice would therefore like to take this opportunity to thank all pharmacists who practice, or have practiced, in the community for their invaluable contribution to society.

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