Pharmacy Schools Council Meeting on 23 January 2023

The Pharmacy Schools Council (PhSC) would like to ensure pharmacy stakeholders are aware of the important issues that are discussed at its Council meeting. Outlined below is a brief summary of the topics that were discussed at the PhSC meeting on Monday 23 January 2023.

Pharmacy as a Career

Feedback from university pharmacy open days suggests that potential MPharm applicants are not aware they will have to develop clinical skills, have direct contact with patients, and will be an independent prescriber when they register as a pharmacist with the General Pharmaceutical Council. The pharmacy course is becoming increasingly challenging and it is important that pharmacy attracts better and more focussed candidates. The PhSC has concerns that the pharmacy profession is not publicising future pharmacy roles well and hence will not be attracting the correct calibre of person to apply for a pharmacy degree. Any pharmacy body or organisation that has an interest in the future pharmacy workforce should be involved in communicating new pharmacy roles, as might secondary schools. The PhSC believes that as the professional body for pharmacy, the Royal Pharmaceutical Society should be taking a lead in promoting future pharmacy careers in all sectors.

ChatGPT

There is has been much recent discussion about the use of artificial intelligence, such as chatbots (e.g. ChatGPT), in academia and research. Chatbots can give detailed answers to questions and there is current concern about the use of chatbots by students. It has been shown that a chatbot can pass the US medical licensing exam and can also mark student submissions almost as effectively as academics. Plagiarism software cannot yet pick up chatbot written reports as a chatbot produces a different report each time it is asked the same question. This may require a review of the type of assessments that are used at undergraduate level and how they are marked. The topic will be discussed in more detail at a future PhSC meeting.

Tariff Payments

During January 2023, tariff payments had been made to some English SoP but there was confusion amongst SoP about whether these payments included requests relating to simulation activities. Furthermore, it was noted that SoP have received differing advice from HEE about whether claims for tariff payment for simulation activities can be made. A consistent message from HEE about what forms of simulation activities are permitted for payment, and details of payment schedules is required.

Genomics

The area of genomics is an expanding area. Currently, most genomics applications are in the oncology area, but as costs fall, genomics will find applications in many other fields, and will eventually impact on all pharmacy sectors. Pharmacy will need experts in genomics, and leaders to drive best practice, service development, and research.

HEE is working to develop an indicative syllabus on genomics in pharmacy and the PhSC supports and is willing to contribute to the preparation of this document. An indicative syllabus on genomics must clearly identify what genomics material should be incorporated into an undergraduate curriculum, and include practical examples of pharmacists using genomics, as well as the theoretical aspects. As genomics is an underpinning science core to a pharmacy curriculum, incorporating genomics into current teaching on, for example, adverse drug reactions, cancer, medicines optimisation and independent prescribing would be preferable to developing a new genomics course. In addition to teaching genomics at undergraduate level, it will also be important to upskill current pharmacists.

Patient safety in community pharmacy and duty of candour

While activities in a community pharmacy are inherently safe, a low incidence of errors does occur which can have an impact on both patients and pharmacists. Currently medicines supply errors are the most common type of errors made by pharmacists, but prescribing errors made by pharmacists are likely to become more common in the future. When an error does occur, communication is key, and all incidents must be fully investigated, and lessons learned. A 'just culture' must exist in pharmacy together with ways of supporting pharmacy colleagues who have made errors. When dealing with medicines errors, the focus must always be on the patient's best interests.

A key question for a School of Pharmacy (SoP) is how best to assess students effectively on patient safety and duty of candour, as an appreciation of duty of candour can only be fully understood once a mistake is made as a pharmacist. Currently, students making a major error e.g. when dispensing, would fail a module, assessment or exam, but there is no follow up on the error or a discussion of how the consequences of the error should be handled. Using simulation may be a possible approach. Students' attitudes will also need to change so they fully accept responsibility for making an error. During the Foundation year there would be opportunities for the tutor/trainee to discuss medicines safety and how to handle errors.

Medicines Safety Officers will have examples of real errors and safety issues that could be used to explain the impact of errors such as serious harm or deaths and Medicines Safety Offices are willing to go to SoP to discuss safety issues with staff and students.

If there are any topics you would like to discuss further with the PhSC Executive, please contact the PhSC secretariat at admin@pharmacyschools.ac.uk