# Changing the way pharmacists learn

*Ahead of the 2018 FIP World Congress of Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences in Glasgow, Scotland, Harriet Pike speaks to educators who are transforming the way pharmacists learn.*

In the classrooms of The University of Sydney, Australia, students from a broad range of health disciplines are working together to solve complex, authentic, clinical cases. Medical trainees collaborate with diagnostic radiography students, who in turn discuss a patient’s drug history with pharmacy students, among others, each relying on the unique knowledge and skills of their peers.

Interprofessional education, while logistically difficult to organise, is an essential component of a health professional’s training, according to Timothy Chen, professor of medication management at the university and an interprofessional education champion. “To get the best outcomes for our patients, healthcare professionals must be able to work effectively in teams,” says Professor Chen, who will share his experiences of this way of learning at the 2018 FIP congress in Glasgow, Scotland. “Transforming outcomes” is the theme of the congress, to be held from 2 to 6 September, which will capture innovations in education that are helping pharmacists practise at the top of their game.

Interprofessional education makes perfect sense: as populations age and health interventions become increasingly complex, teams of specialists will be needed to affect the best outcomes for patients. And while pharmacists are already working in multidisciplinary environments, team work can be complex and complicated and does not necessarily come naturally.

# Sydney’s award-winning programme

Students need to learn how to work with student colleagues from other health disciplines from the outset of their professional training. Professor Chen is part of a team of interprofessional education enthusiasts at The University of Sydney that has taken a small-scale programme of interprofessional learning to a large-scale, award-winning, embedded programme across all health disciplines.

The flagship interprofessional education programme at The University of Sydney, known as the Health Collaboration Challenge, is mandatory for all students enrolled in health vocation programmes ― pharmacy, dentistry, nursing, medicine, occupational therapy, speech pathology and physiotherapy, as well as nutrition, diagnostic radiography and exercise physiology. The initiative was first run in 2015 under a University of Sydney Large Educational Innovation Grant. Since then, the programme has expanded and is now embedded into 14 separate units of study. Students are allocated to teams, with peers from at least six different disciplines. They are asked to work together, technically and clinically, to devise a management plan for a patient with complex health needs. Each team produces a five-minute video and written abstract of their management plan, and, in turn, evaluates their peers’ work.

Ultimately, the goal is to better prepare students for practice ― but it also allows them to demonstrate their unique disciplinary expertise, helping to foster professional pride. Educators will recognise that delivering such a programme is no mean feat. Interprofessional education is notoriously difficult to organise and, for each discipline to be properly engaged in the process, educators from different departments have to collaborate and often permit their students to forego other curriculum components.

At Sydney, over 1,500 students are enrolled annually in health vocation programmes and it has taken strong leadership and champions in each discipline to ensure that the importance of running interprofessional activities at scale is recognised. And it is not just the students who are benefitting from this change in approach to education. Academics are also learning how to work in teams with peers from other health disciplines. “The more you work in teams the more you realise that different people work in different ways and have different skill sets and expertise,” says Professor Chen.

# What do we trust pharmacists to do?

The delivery of interprofessional education at the University of Sydney is just one example of innovation within pharmacy education that will be presented at the FIP congress. Team-based learning and academia’s approach to teaching team building will be explored alongside interprofessional education in sessions entitled “Partners in health” and “Teaching and implementing effective team building”.

New approaches to experiential pharmacy education will be also be explored, including how pharmacy schools in Canada have opened non-dispensing patient care clinics and a case study highlighting 10 years of internship development in Ghana, where experiential training initiatives have focused on developing global communication skills. In addition, speakers will address how “entrustable professional activities” (EPAs) have been developed in medicine and pharmacy and how they are being applied to ensure educators have confidence that their students can perform professional duties unsupervised. In a session entitled “Using the power of EPAs: teaching and transforming practice”, the congress will hear examples of EPAs from different sectors.

A full EPA describes in detail what professionals do; the competencies that people need before they can be trusted to perform that activity; and the approach that will be taken in assessing whether they are ready for unsupervised practice. The Netherlands, the USA and Canada are leading the way in EPA-based medical education. Singapore will apply the approach to nursing training from 2018, and there are programmes that use EPAs for physician assistants. There is interest from midwifery, dentistry and veterinary education, and now pharmacy is coming on board. For example, in the USA there is a national effort to develop and implement EPAs into pharmacy programmes. Olle ten Cate, professor of medical education at the University Medical Center, Utrecht, Netherlands, will share his experiences around developing EPAs in medicine. He says there is a critical point when a supervisor is assured that their student can perform an activity by themselves: “We do this all the time in medical education. We graduate people to become a medical doctor, then a medical specialist. . . . Once you are on that register we assume you have the competencies to do that work in practice.”

# Develop, either as a practitioner or educator

The congress in Glasgow will provide a global platform for the exchange of ideas, mentoring and learning for leaders, academics and educators. Sessions will explore workforce issues, including educational innovations that are seeking to address global workforce needs (“Global workforce development goals — progress and evaluation” and “Global impact and use of FIP education resources for workforce development”). The importance of professional development tools, professional recognition and credentialing and competency-based assessment of education and training will also feature (sessions include “Professional development tools to advance your pharmacy career” and “Global competencies for the pharmacy profession”). And suggestions and advice around training clinical pharmacists and implementing innovative patient care training in pharmacy education will be offered (“Training competent clinical pharmacists — residencies, observation, assessment & feedback” and “Better outcomes for hepatitis C patients in your community”).

In addition to these sessions, FIP forums will bring together experts in interprofessional education, workforce development, IT and academic capacity to discuss and debate topics connected with educational development: digital innovation, higher education development policies, competency-based education and training. A separate Global Deans Forum will bring decision makers working within education together. Academic leaders from around the world will discuss how educational institutions are transforming their pharmacy and pharmaceutical sciences programmes to achieve better health outcomes.

Ian Bates, FIP’s director of education development and professor of education at UCL, UK, says: “This congress is one of the most focused on workforce development and practitioner support. There is something for everyone with an interest in education, career development and workforce strategies.”

The FIP congress will help you develop, either as a practitioner or as an educator. Join your peers in Glasgow for a journey of transformation ― find out how pharmacy education is changing and absorb that learning for yourself.

*The 2018 FIP World Congress of Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences has a strong programme for educators. For the full overview please check here:*

*https://www.fip.org/glasgow2018/programme-day/?select-date=2018-09-03*