

Project Report

A Description of the European Pharmacy Education and Training Quality Assurance Project

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Abstract: The European Union directive on sectoral professions emphasizes the fact that pharmacists working in member states should possess the competences required for their professional practice; the directive does not, however, describe such competences in detail. The “Quality Assurance in European Pharmacy Education and Training—PHAR-QA” consortium, funded by the European Union, will define such competences and establish a

quality assurance system based on them. This will facilitate the tuning of the pharmacy education and training required to produce competent pharmacists in the different member states. PHAR-QA will (1) establish a network of participating pharmacy departments, (2) survey existing quality assurance systems used, and (3) develop competences through iterative interaction with partners. The European Association of Faculties of Pharmacy will use the harmonized competences produced as a basis for the creation of a quality assurance agency for European pharmacy education and training. PHAR-QA will impact on staff and students of European departments; the final stake-holder will be the European patient who will benefit from better pharmaceutical services and better medications.

Keywords: pharmacy; education; quality assurance; competences

1. The Previous “Pharmacy Education in Europe—PHARMINE” Project

The “Quality Assurance in European Pharmacy Education and Training consortium—PHAR-QA” project is based on the work done by the “Pharmacy Education in Europe—PHARMINE” consortium (2008–2011) [1,2]. The latter consisted of 50 pharmacy departments from member states and other European countries that are members of the European Association of Faculties of Pharmacy [3].

In a first phase, the “Pharmacy Education in Europe—PHARMINE” consortium developed a set of competences for pharmacists in collaboration with the Pharmaceutical Group of the European Union that represents community pharmacists [4], and also with the European Association of Hospital Pharmacists representing hospital pharmacists [5], and the European Industrial Pharmacists’ Group, representing pharmacists working in industry [6]. The “Pharmacy Education in Europe—PHARMINE” consortium also collaborated with the European Pharmacy Students’ Association [7].

In a second phase, working with the American Accreditation Council for Pharmacy Education [8], the consortium looked at existing quality assurance systems for pharmacy education and training in the European Union [9]. A questionnaire based on the quality criteria of the International Pharmaceutical Federation [10] and the international committee of the American Accreditation Council for Pharmacy Education [11] was sent out to European departments. Replies were obtained from 28 countries. Just above half have a working quality assurance system. It is likely that those that do not have a quality assurance system did not respond. This underlines the need for a European quality assurance system. Amongst those who did reply, scores were low concerning matters such as evaluation of achievement of mission and goals suggesting, again that a system based on competences is required.

A third aspect of the project was the development of a database of European contacts in pharmacy education and training.

2. The Present “Quality Assurance in European Pharmacy Education and Training—PHAR-QA Project

PHAR-QA (2012–2015) extends the “Pharmacy Education in Europe—PHARMINE” project; it is also funded by the European Union. PHAR-QA is run by a consortium of universities led by the

Pharmacy Faculty of the Vrije Universiteit Brussel and Pharmacolor Consultants, Nancy, France with the participation of:

- University of Granada, Spain
- National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, Greece
- University of Tartu, Estonia
- University of Helsinki, Finland
- University of Ljubljana, Slovenia
- Jagiellonian University of Cracow, Poland
- Medical and Pharmaceutical University Carol Davila of Bucharest, Romania

PHAR-QA will build on the competences for pharmacists developed in the “Pharmacy Education in Europe—PHARMINE” project as well as the questionnaire on quality assurance in pharmacy education that project developed. It will further develop the database of contacts in European pharmacy education.

PHAR-QA works in parallel with other initiatives in healthcare disciplines (Table 1). There is collaboration between PHAR-QA and the “Medical Education in Europe—MEDINE” group who are currently developing the third stage of their project [12]. The two groups representing the dental profession, the Association for Dental Education in Europe [13] and the Council of European Dentists [14], are working on a joint position on competences for dentists. PHAR-QA has contacts with these groups.

Table 1. Production of competence frameworks by parallel initiatives in healthcare disciplines.

Acronym	PHAR-QA	MEDINE	ADEE	CED
Name	Quality Assurance in European Pharmacy Education and Training	Medical education in Europe	Association for Dental Education in Europe	Council of European Dentists
Date of publication of competences	>2013	2008	2009	2009

The PHAR-QA consortium will propose foundation and advanced level competences for pharmacy practice and for specialized activities in hospital, industrial [15] and/or laboratory medicine settings. These will be validated by an iterative Delphi [16] interaction with the pharmacy departments in the PHAR-QA network. PHAR-QA uses the TUNING process, an approach to developing quality first, second and third cycle degree programs taking into account the political objectives of the Bologna group [17].

3. Outcomes of PHAR-QA and Their Impact

The competence framework produced by PHAR-QA will be useful in setting up and/or modifying curricula in European pharmacy departments at a time when new areas such as pharmaceutical care are developing.

Another aspect is that many of the science and biomedical competences—as well as the competences required for generic skills such as management and information technology—are common not only to pharmacy but also to medicine and dentistry. Thus the work of PHAR-QA and its

interactions with similar groups in other healthcare professions will be useful in the development of common courses for future healthcare professionals.

The framework will also be of value as a guide when considering experiential learning and continuous professional development—two areas of gathering importance. These two ways of developing competences rely much more on skills acquired during professional practice than on knowledge acquired through academic learning. In such a case, a system defined by competences is more useful than one defined by course content.

In collaboration with TUNING [17], PHAR-QA will look at the compatibility of competences in pharmacy with the bachelor-master degree structure proposed by the Bologna group [18]. The consortium will examine the possibility of employment for a graduate who decides to leave university with foundation level competences only—knowing that qualification of the exercise of pharmacy practice as defined by European Union directives requires a 5-year degree course. The latter will not change when the current directive is amended [19].

4. Conclusions

PHAR-QA will produce a harmonized model for quality assurance in pharmacy education and training that will be exploited through the European Association of Faculties of Pharmacy leading to the creation of a European agency for quality assurance in pharmacy education and training. PHAR-QA will impact on European pharmacy department staff and students; the final stake-holder will be the European patient who will benefit from better pharmaceutical services using better medications.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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