

Future perspectives of hospital pharmacy in Lithuania

An interview with Professor Vitalis Briedis, the Dean of Pharmacy in Kaunas Medical University and a group of pharmaceutical students, about hospital pharmacy and its future in Lithuania.

EJHP: *What is your view of hospital pharmacy and its importance in Lithuania?*

Professor Briedis: It would be strange if I said that hospital pharmacy is unimportant, but this pharmaceutical activity is not developed in Lithuania. In my opinion, drug prescription in hospitals must be taken under serious control. Though the role of a pharmacist is not formally licensed, the importance of hospital pharmacy is evident. Hospital pharmacy practice must acquire a defined legal basis and functions, including clinical pharmacy and documentation of quality control.

EJHP: *Do Lithuanian students get enough information during their Master's degree studies to work in a hospital pharmacy?*

Professor Briedis: The knowledge they get in the basic undergraduate course is surely insufficient. If a pharmacist decides to improve himself in a hospital or clinical pharmacy sphere, he will definitely need additional knowledge. University can never guarantee that a student's knowledge is sufficient, especially when it needs constant renewal. So here we have to move from the model of studies in which the student listens to the lectures, to the individual work of a motivated pharmacist.

EJHP: *What are the most important disciplines in a hospital pharmacist's work?*

Professor Briedis: It would be unfair to mark out one as the most important, but it's logical to assume that the hospital pharmacist mostly works with various clinical cases and appropriate pharmacotherapy. So probably the most

important thing would be the knowledge of internal diseases, pharmacotherapy and pharmacokinetics. Moreover, a pharmacist should know how to communicate with patients and his colleagues. Direct contact with a sick patient is responsible work, requiring specialist knowledge.

EJHP: *Why do pharmacists in Lithuania not specialise in clinical pharmacy?*

Professor Briedis: The main reason is very simple – we don't have a formally validated position of clinical pharmacy. We need to determine what knowledge is needed and how to impart it, how to evaluate professional skills and what practice is required before starting to work in this field. Clinical pharmacy demands a high level of practical knowledge, including good communication skills with patients and also with medicine specialists. It is necessary to define the ranges of competence and the main functions of a clinical pharmacist. Finally, this function has to be represented to society, especially the medical fraternity, to inform them of the role of a qualified clinical pharmacist.

EJHP: *How is the faculty planning to use the experience of EU countries, particularly in the sphere of clinical pharmacy, to improve pharmacy studies?*

Professor Briedis: A group has been formed to address the disciplines required for clinical pharmacy and the forms in which this material should be presented. For example, what problems and goals of clinical pharmacy should be taught in pharmaceutical technologies or pharmaceutical chemistry? I have visited some foreign universities

and I didn't see clinical pharmacy separated from the basic pharmacy studies, so these things should be incorporated into the existing pharmacy courses. In some European universities there is an opportunity to specialise in clinical pharmacy, while in the US, clinical pharmacy residency is very popular. The length of such studies is from one to two years, and it is intended for highly motivated students. I think that in the first stage we will review the undergraduate courses, and after this we will be able to talk about postgraduate clinical pharmacy studies, modeling them on those of UK or French universities.

Student opinions

A discussion was held with Kaunas University of Medicine pharmacy students to find out their attitude towards hospital pharmacy. Most of the students said they get enough theoretical knowledge during their studies to work in a hospital pharmacy, but they do not have appropriate practice. Lack of contact with hospital pharmacy was given as one of the main reasons why students are not motivated to work in Lithuanian hospitals.

If it were possible, about 15% of surveyed students would like to do postgraduate clinical pharmacy. So the situation in hospital pharmacy is improving and we can expect some really good changes in this field.

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