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Short communication

Professional commitment and ethical responsibility in early-career hospital pharmacists

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Introduction

Pharmacy practice has evolved considerably over recent decades. Hospital pharmacists are increasingly involved in clinical activities, medication management, procurement processes, research, quality assurance, and multidisciplinary patient care (FIP, 2021; WHO, 2020). As their role expands, ethical challenges become more complex.

Although pharmacy ethics is commonly associated with patient care, confidentiality, and safe medication use, it also encompasses responsibilities toward colleagues, healthcare institutions, and the profession itself (Albsoul-Younes and Tahaineh, 2018). Professional behavior, accountability, communication, teamwork, and commitment to continuity of service are essential components of pharmacy practice.

The transition from university education to professional practice may be challenging for newly graduated pharmacists, whose expectations may differ from the realities of hospital pharmacy. Previous studies suggest that pharmacy graduates may feel insufficiently prepared for ethical challenges encountered in practice (Al-Shamali et al., 2015; Hassoun and Farah, 2017).

This paper presents a real-life case from hospital pharmacy practice and explores issues related to professional responsibility, commitment, and professional identity formation among early-career pharmacists.

Case Presentation

A newly licensed pharmacist was employed in a hospital pharmacy under a temporary employment agreement. During the first months of employment, he became involved in various activities necessary for the daily functioning of the pharmacy, including medication management, stock control, and support in procurement-related processes. As the pharmacy operated with limited personnel, pharmacists were expected to contribute to a broad range of professional and organizational responsibilities.

Over time, the pharmacist expressed dissatisfaction with the scope of work and stated that certain activities required greater financial recognition. He became increasingly reluctant to participate in some responsibilities that were considered important for the functioning of the pharmacy. After several months of employment, he resigned with immediate effect and without prior discussion regarding the transition of ongoing duties.

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The departure created operational difficulties related to medication management and continuity of pharmacy services.

The case raises ethical questions regarding the balance between fair working conditions, professional responsibility, commitment to healthcare institutions, and the obligations of healthcare professionals during employment transitions.

Discussion

The presented case highlights ethical and professional challenges that may arise during the transition from pharmacy education to hospital practice. Although pharmacists are trained to assume responsibility for medication-related processes and patient care, hospital pharmacy practice often requires engagement in a broader range of activities that support the functioning of the healthcare system (FIP, 2021; WHO, 2020). One of the central questions raised by this case is how early-career pharmacists perceive their professional role. Hospital pharmacy extends beyond medication dispensing and includes responsibilities related to medication management, stock control, procurement processes, quality assurance, and collaboration with other healthcare professionals (FIP, 2021; WHO, 2020). While these activities may not always involve direct patient interaction, they remain essential for ensuring the safe and continuous supply of medicines. From the pharmacist's perspective, concerns regarding workload and financial compensation are legitimate. Healthcare institutions have a responsibility to provide fair working conditions, adequate staffing, and appropriate recognition of professional contributions. However, professional responsibility in healthcare extends beyond employment conditions alone. Pharmacy codes of ethics emphasize accountability, integrity, respect for colleagues, and commitment to the welfare of patients and healthcare institutions (Albsoul-Younes and Tahaineh, 2018; American Pharmacists Association, 2021). Professional commitment is increasingly recognized as an essential component of professional identity, linking individual responsibilities with the broader goals of healthcare institutions and patient care. In this context, communication becomes a critical element of ethical practice. When professional disagreements arise, open dialogue and responsible communication may help prevent conflicts and reduce their impact on healthcare services. The ethical dilemma in this case does not arise from the pharmacist's decision to resign or to seek fair compensation, but from the way professional responsibilities were managed during the transition. Providing adequate notice, communicating concerns, and ensuring appropriate transfer of responsibilities may be viewed as ethical obligations toward colleagues, institutions, and patients.

This case also highlights the importance of professional identity formation among newly graduated pharmacists. Previous studies suggest that pharmacy graduates may feel insufficiently prepared for ethical challenges encountered in practice (Al-Shamali et al., 2015; Hassoun and Farah, 2017). Strengthening mentorship, workplace integration, and ethics education may help support a smoother transition into professional practice.

Conclusion

Professional commitment is increasingly recognized as an essential component of pharmacists' professional identity, reflecting their responsibility to support the continuity and effective functioning of hospital pharmacy services while balancing individual rights with professional obligations.

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