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Global Trends in Pharmacy Workforce Development and Education

Sun Jiang*

Department of Clinical Pharmacology and Therapeutics, University of Malta, Msida, Malta

***Corresponding author:** Sun Jiang, Department of Clinical Pharmacology and Therapeutics, University of Malta, Msida, Malta; **Email:** jiang.sun@malta.edu

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Introduction

The pharmacy profession has evolved rapidly over the past few decades, adapting to the changing demands of healthcare systems and patient needs worldwide. With the expansion of pharmacists' roles from medication dispensing to active participation in clinical care, education and workforce development have become central to ensuring that pharmacy professionals are adequately prepared for modern healthcare challenges. International organizations such as the World Health Organization (WHO) and the International Pharmaceutical Federation (FIP) have emphasized the need for a competent, adaptable and sustainable pharmacy workforce that can support global health priorities. These include universal health coverage, access to essential medicines and the growing burden of chronic diseases. As pharmacy practice continues to expand into areas such as patient counseling, public health, pharmacogenomics and digital health, education systems must keep pace by preparing pharmacists with the necessary skills, knowledge and competencies. Global trends in pharmacy workforce development highlight both progress and disparities across regions. High-income countries have seen a shift toward clinical and advanced practice roles, while low- and middle-income countries continue to face workforce shortages, uneven distribution of pharmacists and limited access to training resources. Addressing these gaps requires collaborative strategies that emphasize competency-based education, interprofessional learning, lifelong professional development and equitable workforce planning [1].

Description

One major global trend in pharmacy education is the shift toward competency-based curricula that emphasize practical skills, patient-centered care and interprofessional collaboration. Traditional pharmacy programs, once heavily focused on pharmacology, pharmaceutics and dispensing, are being restructured to integrate clinical decision-making, communication and leadership competencies. For example, many universities worldwide have adopted problem-based learning, case simulations and experiential rotations to better prepare graduates for real-world practice. Accreditation standards from bodies such as the Accreditation Council for Pharmacy Education (ACPE) in the United States and parallel agencies in Europe, Asia and Africa emphasize outcome-driven education aligned with healthcare needs. This movement reflects a recognition that pharmacists must go beyond knowledge acquisition to demonstrate competencies that directly influence patient outcomes and healthcare quality [2].

Another key trend is the expansion of postgraduate education and specialization within pharmacy. As the complexity of pharmacotherapy and healthcare delivery grows, pharmacists are pursuing advanced degrees, residencies and fellowships in areas such as clinical pharmacy, oncology, geriatrics, infectious diseases and health informatics. In many countries, postgraduate training has become essential for pharmacists to practice in specialized hospital or clinical settings. This trend supports the broader shift toward advanced practice roles, where pharmacists actively participate in therapeutic decision-making, patient counseling and policy development. However, access to advanced training remains uneven globally, with resource-limited countries facing challenges in offering such programs. International partnerships and digital education platforms are increasingly being used to bridge these gaps, allowing for shared curricula and global collaboration in pharmacy education [3].

Pharmacy workforce development is also shaped by demographic trends and healthcare system demands. Global shortages of pharmacists, particularly in low- and middle-income countries, threaten the equitable delivery of healthcare services. In some regions, the pharmacist-to-population ratio remains critically low, creating barriers to medication access, patient education and public health initiatives. At the same time, high-income countries face challenges related to workforce distribution, with urban areas often oversaturated and rural or underserved regions lacking adequate pharmacy coverage. Workforce planning strategies now emphasize equitable distribution, task-shifting and collaborative practice models to optimize the use of available resources. Policies encouraging the integration of pharmacy technicians and community health workers into care models further support efficiency while allowing pharmacists to focus on higher-level clinical responsibilities [4].

The integration of digital health and global mobility further shapes the pharmacy workforce landscape. The rise of telepharmacy, electronic health records and mobile health applications has expanded the scope of pharmacy practice, creating demand for new skill sets in informatics, data analysis and digital communication. Additionally, globalization has increased the mobility of pharmacists, with professionals often seeking opportunities abroad in response to labor demands. This trend has sparked discussions around the harmonization of educational standards, credential recognition and international competency frameworks. The FIP's Workforce Development Goals (WDGs) provide a roadmap for building sustainable and adaptable pharmacy education systems, focusing on quality assurance, workforce intelligence and lifelong learning. These initiatives highlight the importance of collaboration across borders to ensure that the pharmacy workforce can meet global health challenges effectively [5].

Conclusion

Global trends in pharmacy workforce development and education reflect the profession's transition toward patient-centered, competency-based and technologically integrated practice. While high-income countries have made significant progress in expanding advanced education and clinical roles, disparities persist in resource-limited settings where shortages and limited training opportunities remain major obstacles. Addressing these challenges requires international collaboration, investment in education infrastructure and the adoption of competency-driven curricula that prepare pharmacists for evolving healthcare needs. With the support of frameworks such as the FIP Workforce Development Goals, the global pharmacy workforce can continue to adapt, ensuring equitable access to medicines, effective healthcare delivery and improved patient outcomes worldwide.

Acknowledgment

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Conflict of Interest

None.

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