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More Evidence of Professionalism and Professional Engagement

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Aronson and Janke wrote an insightful article on a critical topic with limited prior evidence—the importance of student pharmacists' professional engagement.¹ We hoped to extend their evidence further with a few other noteworthy findings.

The first comes from the American College of Clinical Pharmacy's (ACCP) national student leaders who highlighted professional engagement (ie, professional stewardship) as one of six tenets of professionalism for student pharmacists.² This despite that "Pharmacists' Tenets for Professionalism" do not mention professional engagement.³

The second comes from an instrument developed to measure professionalism of recent PharmD graduates.⁴ A number of items described professional engagement and the instrument showed exceptionally-high unidimensionality. (Another geographically-separate cohort of recent graduates confirmed a very-high unidimensionality.⁵) This very-high unidimensionality suggests that these graduates had a clear-cut concept of professionalism—and items regarding professional engagement were extremely congruent with the overall instrument.

Further evidence comes from AOB's and JBW's perspectives as developing student pharmacists. Every student pharmacist that AOB and JBW are aware of (including themselves) has the potential to develop throughout their pharmacy education. Professionalism is not a destination but a journey, and so periodic reflection-writing throughout students' didactic education has been an important tool in helping focus their professionalism, especially reflections focused on professional engagement. As the authors have interacted with classmates, learners revisiting prior reflections in subsequent classwork had really helped students to formatively track their growth throughout their pharmacy schooling. The recent 2016 Accreditation Council for Pharmacy Education's (ACPE) PharmD Standards ask institutions to assess student pharmacists' professional development;⁶ from our experience, a key to effectively assessing student pharmacists' professionalism is using a standard framework, such as the ACCP tenets of professionalism for student pharmacists.^{7,8}

Of note based on these authors' experiences, it appears that a student pharmacist's level of professional engagement is determined by each student's level of motivation, which stems from identifying with *the profession*. This profession-centered identity of a student pharmacist (not "pharmacy student") has two parts. On one hand, student pharmacists are engaged in the student's *individual development into a professional*. On the other hand, importantly and often neglected student pharmacists are also engaged in activities and opportunities that *further develop the profession*. This adds to professional stewardship/engagement as more than just moving some learning "outside of the classroom"²—it is a way for student pharmacists to progressively unify their parallel development of personal and professional identity formation.

It would be very remiss not to highlight Aronson and Janke's assessment approach.¹ This approach sounded very similar to an "assessment-for-learning" approach as advocated by others.^{9,10} We applaud their approach in moving beyond a conventional assessment-of-learning perspective. The most recent ACPE Standards 2016 are focused on cultivating and developing future pharmacists,⁶ which seem best assessed formatively. Recently, we had presented a similar formative approach to assessment of professionalism.^{7,8}

Similar to Aronson and Janke, we also encourage further study of professional engagement's impact on student pharmacists' success. Showing this success to first-year student pharmacists early in their professional identity formation could be very helpful and impressionable.

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