

More Insights Regarding a Global Pharmacy Council

Dominique Jordan, President; Catherine Duggan, CEO
International Pharmaceutical Federation (FIP)

Dear Editor,

We write to comment on the Idea Paper by Raza *et al*, “A portrait of the pharmacy profession globally: Pharmacist universal professional identity and establishment of global pharmacy council”, published in *Innovations in pharmacy*, January, 2022; 13[1]: 1-11.

In brief, the paper postulates “recent research suggests that pharmacists have a professional identity crisis” and argues that a “global pharmacy council” is needed to:

- “Build international recognition of pharmacy, pharmacy role, policies and value”;
- “Influence, promote and secure acceptance of pharmacist (sic) as an important and integral part of health systems”;
- “Conduct empirical research about pharmacists and their work”.

However, such an organisation already exists — the International Pharmaceutical Federation (FIP) is the global body representing over four million pharmacists, pharmaceutical scientists and pharmacy educators, with members representing 154 countries and territories. It is a non-governmental organisation that has been in official relations with United Nations agencies — World Health Organization and UNESCO — for many years. In fact, this September will mark the 111th year since FIP’s establishment.

FIP’s vision is a world where everyone benefits from access to safe, effective, quality and affordable medicines and health technologies, as well as from pharmaceutical care services provided by pharmacists, in collaboration with other healthcare professionals. Our mission is to support global health by enabling the advancement of pharmaceutical practice, sciences and education. We do this in many ways, including performing all the activities Raza *et al* described for their proposed “global pharmacy council”. Indeed, the authors discussed data gathered by FIP and our findings on different national standards for pharmacist professionalism in a substantial portion of their paper. This indicates that they are aware of FIP’s existence but perhaps are ill-informed on the work that we do for the profession. We would, therefore, welcome the opportunity to

share with your readers some salient points on how FIP is performing all the activities and already fulfilling all the functions given by Raza *et al* as the rationale for the establishment of a global pharmacy council.

“Professional identity crisis”?

Our view is that the research cited by the authors on pharmacists’ perceptions is too dated to be relied on as the basis of a well-founded argument. Most of the papers were published between 1987 and 2003, and as far as we could see the most recent paper cited, published in 2019, was not based on any specific formal evaluation being conducted. We believe it inadvisable for undue consideration to be given to perceptions that are over 20 years old, when in the past two decades our world has seen so many changes and, supported by the work of FIP and its members, our pharmacy profession has seen so many advancements recognising its expert knowledge and integral place in health systems. We set out just a few examples of advancements in this letter.

Global recognition as being integral to health systems

Since 2016, the density of pharmacists (per 10,000 population) has been used by the United Nations as a standardised measure of progress with Sustainable Development Goal 3 (“Ensure healthy lives promote well-being for all at all ages”).^{1,2} Before that time, only the number of physicians, nurses and midwives were considered relevant. That the UN now recognizes the number of pharmacists as being important for well-being and all governments are now asked to report on the density of pharmacists is a profound testament to the value of FIP’s extensive work on education and workforce and to the value of our advocacy work, which has built international recognition of pharmacy.

A 2019 World Health Organization report said: “community pharmacists are the health professionals most accessible to the public and are a cornerstone of primary health care. The role of community pharmacists is expanding globally”.³ However, we believe that the three and a half years of pandemic have accelerated opportunities for our profession and the dedication demonstrated by pharmacists to serve their communities has led to unprecedented recognition. Throughout the pandemic, community pharmacists continued to provide health care and pharmacies remained open, even during lockdowns when many other health facilities were closed. They have been thanked and recognised by the public, health authorities, health ministers

Correspondence: Lin-Nam Wang
Head of Corporate Communications & Advocacy
International Pharmaceutical Federation (FIP)
The Hague, Netherlands
Lin-Nam@fip.org

and heads of state as frontline healthcare professionals who provide vaccinations, testing, treatment, advice and referral.

FIP's promotion of the profession during this time included collaboration with colleagues in Poland on an international campaign of recognition, "Pharmacy Heroes",⁴ in the first year of the pandemic. As the global body representing pharmacy, FIP worked to build solidarity and collaboration within the profession. In 2021, for example, the FIP-led World Pharmacists Day campaign saw 190 countries of the United Nations share the message of trust in pharmacy.⁵

We would also like to highlight that, as recommended by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development in 2021, many countries have introduced changes to legislation to expand the role of pharmacists to relieve pressure on the rest of the healthcare system.⁶

Research about pharmacists and their work

The FIP Global Pharmaceutical Observatory (GPO) is a worldwide data hub that exists to inform the advocacy work of our members and partners. Our vision is for it to be the most comprehensive and respected source of pharmacy data and intelligence. FIP has developed a visualisation platform: the FIP Atlas, which displays impactful pharmaceutical data in an innovative way including the work of our profession during the 1,000 days of the COVID-19 pandemic from 2020 to 2022.

FIP has gathered data on pharmacists for many years and we have shared our findings with the profession. For example, FIP research about pharmacists and their work published in 2017 showed that the services provided by community pharmacies around the world, beyond the dispensing of medicines, include diagnostics (e.g. testing for HIV, cholesterol, COVID-19), management of hypertension, diabetes and asthma, short-course treatment for tuberculosis, management of anticoagulation, opioid substitution, smoking cessation, and health promotion, according to a FIP survey completed by national pharmacy organisations in 74 countries.⁷ FIP research has also demonstrated the expansion of pharmacists' roles in vaccination, with permission to administer vaccinations in at least 36 countries in 2020.⁸

A bit more about FIP

FIP unites practitioners, pharmaceutical scientists and pharmacy educators from across the globe under one roof. FIP has representation in all six WHO regions. FIP has sections, special interest groups and focus groups representing many different fields of pharmacy. FIP also brings all these regions and fields together through cross-cutting commissions, advisory groups and working groups on issues of critical global importance, such as digital health, pharmacy workforce capacity, antimicrobial resistance, access to medicines and

pharmaceutical care, professional regulation, pandemic preparedness and sustainability.

FIP works to support the entire pharmacy profession through a wide variety of international resources. For example, we suggest that any colleagues experiencing a "professional identity crisis" as described by Raza *et al*, may find FIP's Statement of Professional Standards on codes of ethics for pharmacists⁹ (approved by professional organisations in 91 countries) and FIP's Oath/promise of a pharmacist,¹⁰ (available in 18 languages) helpful to refer to. In addition, we bring to attention the FIP Development Goals,¹¹ launched in 2020, which are a fundamental resource for transforming the pharmacy profession over the next decade globally, regionally and nationally, aligning with FIP's mission and wider imperatives underpinning the UN Sustainable Development Goals. Resources such as these, from FIP, describe the mission of the pharmacy profession to society, which is the first of seven functions that Raza *et al* propose for a global pharmacy council. Indeed, FIP already fulfils all the proposed functions.

We acknowledge that there is still much work to be done, but our perception is that the future is bright for our profession and we are emerging from this pandemic bigger and better.

We believe that every pharmacist should be proud to belong to the profession.

In conclusion, the establishment of a "global pharmacy council" is unnecessary and would be a misdirection of efforts and resources when FIP already exists and has a long record of achievement for the profession. We hope that readers will find the work of FIP of interest. We encourage them to find out more from the FIP website (www.fip.org) and in FIP's latest [annual report](https://www.fip.org/file/5514) (<https://www.fip.org/file/5514>) and we invite them to consider joining us and taking a bigger part in advancing the profession around the world.

Yours sincerely,

Dominique Jordan
President

Catherine Duggan
CEO

International Pharmaceutical Federation (FIP)

Conflicts of Interest: Mr. Jordan is an elected officer of FIP. Dr. Duggan is employed by FIP.

Disclaimer: The statements and opinions expressed are those of the authors.

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