

CONFERENCE ABSTRACTS

FIP Seville conference abstracts 2022

80th FIP World Congress of Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences in Seville, Spain, 18 to 22 September 2022

New generation of pharmaceutical scientists

Pharmacy education, early career progression, and professional identity formation in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic: A qualitative assessment of perspectives

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Background: The institution of infection control measures in response to COVID-19 resulted in a large-scale disruption in school and work environments in Nigeria. Tertiary institutions, including the 24 pharmacy schools in Nigeria, halted on-site activities, and some attempted a transition to virtual means of continuous education. In addition, young pharmacists in the early stages of their careers were faced with emerging roles in their spheres of pharmacy practice while also adapting to the measures instituted at their respective places of work. Both series of events have potentially affected professional identity formation among young pharmacists, making for a fascinating space for exploration.

Objectives: The study attempts to provide insight into the perspectives of pharmacy students and pharmacists in the early stages of their careers towards the secondary effects of the pandemic on pharmacy education, early career progression, and professional identity formation among young pharmacists.

Methods: This qualitative study employs virtually administered in-depth interviews. 13 pharmacy students in their sophomore or final year of study during the lockdown were selected from various schools; six young pharmacists were sampled across various fields of pharmacy practice. The interviews were done individually, and they featured questions on the respondents' perception of pharmacy education, pharmacy practice, and transition from pharmacy education to pharmacy practice. It assessed their perceptions of pharmacists as professionals, the impact of events surrounding the pandemic, and their appraisal of the preparedness of pharmacy education and the healthcare sector to combat another pandemic of a nature and magnitude like COVID-19. Transcripts of the interviews were prepared, coded into themes, and analysed using Microsoft Excel and SPSS V25.0

Results: Students believed the quality of pharmacy education reduced significantly due to the pandemic, citing the increased pressure on students to cope with tighter schedules and technical issues that hampered virtual classes. The students generally perceived pharmacists in terms of the products and services they provide, most calling them 'drug experts'. Only a minority recognised the role of pharmacists in patient care within a multidisciplinary healthcare team. They also identified the roles of pharmacists in healthcare that emerged during the pandemic.

The respondents reportedly experienced significant disruptions in providing pharmaceutical care within their spheres of practice during the lockdown. They also reported that the pandemic exposed a need for pharmacists to take up more responsibility in health provision and cited infrastructural deficiencies that frustrate the efforts of pharmacists and other professionals in the healthcare space, becoming apparent due to the pandemic. Young pharmacists generally believed transitioning from pharmacy education to practice was difficult, some citing previous work experience exposure as increasing the ease of transition.

Conclusions: The findings of this study suggest that structural deficiencies in pharmacy education and practice in Nigeria have made the experience of younger professionals more susceptible to the pandemic which has impacted their professional identity formation.

This study also provides basis for a more extensive probe of the specific factors that affect early career progression among pharmacists and how large-scale disruptions like the pandemic might affect them and, consequently, pharmacy practice in Nigeria.

All aboard: A cross-sectional study to characterise the population of young Portuguese pharmacists working abroad

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Background: Within the European Union, Portugal is one of the countries with the highest number of emigrants and according to the United Nations, 27.8% of total international migrants are between 20 and 35 years old. At the same time, when looking at employability in the pharmaceutical sector, the Portuguese Pharmaceutical Society found out, in a study from 2019, that, although the results are generally good for this professional class, young pharmacists today face more challenges in getting access to the jobs of their preferences than previous generations.

Objectives: In this context, the Portuguese Association of Young Pharmacists (APJF) interrogated young Portuguese pharmacists (20 to 35 years old) working and living abroad, to understand what motivated them to seek an international career and to have a good understanding of their background.

Methods: This was a descriptive, cross-sectional study. Between July and October 2021, a web survey was implemented, targeting young Portuguese pharmacists working and living abroad. The survey was developed using the tool Google Forms and was published and disseminated in APJF's communication channels. Responses were collected anonymously. The survey was composed of three main sections. In the first section socio-demographic data as age, gender and place of work were collected. That was followed by another segment to understand participant's motivations and previous international experiences. The final section focused on questions related to their willingness to return.

Results: During the four months of the survey 64 responses were collected. From the responders group, 4.7% were between 20 and 25 years old, 57.8% between 26 and 30 and 37.5% between 31 and 35. Most participants currently work in a country within the European Union, with Belgium being

the most frequently reported. At the same time, the Pharmaceutical Industry is the most prevalent area of employment. When it comes to previous international experience, 87.5% of the participants had an international experience as students and most of them (78.1%) had already worked in Portugal before moving to another country. Among the motivations to emigrate were: 'better career opportunities', 'better salaries' and 'greatest professional recognition' were the most frequent. Distance from home seems to be the least positive point in the participant's experience. Coming back to Portugal has always been part of the plan for the majority of the participants (59.4%). However, most of them do not seem to be part of a short-term plan. Among the possible reasons to come back, 'good career opportunities' and 'family issues' are the most frequently reported.

Conclusions: Although salary and better working conditions are among the motivations that make young Portuguese pharmacists emigrate, they mainly look for better career opportunities, better work environments and personal and professional development. Further research should be conducted to generalise these results and to understand the impact of the emigration phenomenon in the pharmaceutical profession in Portugal.

White book: The vision of young Portuguese pharmacists for the decade

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Background: Currently, the Portuguese Health System faces numerous challenges that require reflection at various levels. At the same time, approximately 40% of active pharmacists in Portugal, registered at the Portuguese Pharmaceutical Society, are under 35 years old. Hence, there must be an active voice and a vital contribution of the young professionals' community in emerging issues that impact society, regarding pharmaceutical activity and general health.

Objectives: The White Book, an initiative promoted by the Portuguese Association of Young Pharmacists (APJF), aims to reflect, consolidate and share the vision of Young Portuguese Pharmacists for the next decade in the health sector. The document seeks to express the vision in areas, which the authors believe will undergo a significant transformation, anticipating a future full of opportunities and a unique need for agility and adaptation.

Methods: The project started in November 2020 and had the involvement of 100 young pharmacists, in a Reflection Forum with an open debate and joint discussion method, where the

central axes of the White Book were defined. Then, the participants were organized into six groups and each one of them actively discussed a specific topic over the following months, identifying challenges and opportunities and reaching a common point of view. They also collaborated with experts from other areas of knowledge, healthcare professionals, policymakers and patient representatives. The process concluded in a public consultation with all APJF members that allowed a strengthening of the positions. Finally, the results were presented in a public forum to the main stakeholders of the health sector and society.

Results: After initial discussions, six main topics were identified: a better-informed society for health and well-being; an ecosystem for sharing health data and information; a forward-looking regulation for the sector and the profession; universal access to health technologies and innovation; a vision for modernising the pharmacist's competence framework and an evolution of pharmaceutical intervention for the society. As the foundation of this transformation, the discussion began by addressing the importance of a better-informed society for health and well-being, strengthening health literacy and the role of health professionals, but also the commitment that citizens themselves must assume. There was also a reflection on the urgency of the existence of an ecosystem for sharing data and information in health. The future of the profession and how to ensure universal access to health technologies and innovation were also discussed. In the end, the documents resulted in 40 measures to improve the future of the health sector in Portugal.

Conclusions: The White Book reflects the modernity of a generation of young health professionals who, recognising the challenges of the system where they work, reflect on the future that they want for their country and its society. A bold set of ambitions and proposals aim to contribute to a better application and management of resources in health for the well-being of a more evolved society. The next step is to socialise all the measures identified and to partner with different stakeholders towards implementation.