

Looking for Accreditation of Pharmacy Programs, Is It Luxury or Necessity?

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Editorial

Pharmacy schools all over the world are seeking accreditation by one of internationally reputable accrediting bodies to reassure that different types of scientific courses, necessary training skills, learning strategies, assessment methods and professionalism, offered in the program, convey and aligned with the latest international standards and developments in pharmacy education and their graduates are committed to quality in health care services. On the other hand, accreditation provides credit to the pharmacy institutions to merchandise their accreditation certificate as "Trade Mark" to attract more applicants and occupy respectable position in the society. The Accreditation Council for Pharmacy Education (ACPE) in the USA occupies the prime worldwide position for accrediting pharmacy programs including those institution adopting 'Doctor of Pharmacy, PharmD' curriculum, yet, ACPE only accredits programs in the states and provides certification to programs outside USA. The Canadian Council for Accreditation of Pharmacy Programs (CCAPP) accredits pharmacy programs in and outside Canada. There are other international accrediting bodies in other countries as Great Britain, Germany and Australia. Meanwhile, in Saudi Arabia and Egypt, there are national accrediting bodies, namely, 'National Commission of Academic Accreditation and Assessment, NCAAA' and 'National Authority for Quality Assurance and Assessment of Education, NAQAAE', respectively. However, these last two accrediting bodies provide general standards for the quality of university education that assure the application of the national policies of higher education in general, and attributes for graduates of pharmacy programs, in specific, but no detailed standards and evaluation requirements for pharmacy programs.

As PharmD program has been first introduced in the Gulf area in 2002 by the Faculty of Pharmacy at King Abdulaziz University as a leading institute in this regard, it has then been adopted by other pharmacy institutions in Saudi Arabia and Qatar to prepare graduates able to practice pharmaceutical care. To reassure that the quality of teaching, learning, training and assessment methods applied to their candidates satisfy the international standards in pharmacy education in general and PharmD curriculum, in specific, several pharmacy schools has started seeking accreditation from international accrediting bodies. Some of these institutions have awarded full, conditional or provisional accreditation for their PharmD programs by CCAPP. In fact, the accreditation process is harsh and needs qualified team from the institution to prepare their own self-evaluation report according to the CCAPP standards and provides documentations and evidences supporting how far these standards are obeyed and extracts points of strength, weakness and suggestions for improvements of the program under accreditation.

During the site visit, the accrediting team belonging to the accrediting body is composed of university professors and experts in pharmacy education. They provide rigorous evaluation of how far the self-evaluation report meets reality through direct contact and meetings with leaders in the pharmacy institute, faculties, students, staff, preceptors and stakeholders. Learning resources, including, lecture halls, library, clinical skill labs, simulated pharmacy, training sites are also investigated by the accrediting team. Moreover, certain complementary criteria and activities that included in the accreditation standards are additionally examined and evidences for the proper understanding and application of these criteria and activities is carried out. Interprofessional education and training (IPE) is very important activity that must be implemented in the pharmacy program. In IPE, mutual meetings, discussions, seminars and workshops are organized and conducted between students of pharmacy medicine, and nursery to allow them to understand the individual role of each member in the future health team, train then for proper communication within the team and how a therapeutic decisions are taken. Accrediting team examines how far pharmacy students perform the advanced pharmacy practice experience; APPE; namely clerkships, conducted at different training sites at the last academic year of the PharmD program and the qualifications of the preceptors supervising these trainings. Sufficient clinical skills and pharmacy practice experience must be fulfilled at this level of the program. Related to APPE, is the early pharmacy practice experience (EPPE) that must be implemented in the pharmacy curriculum and allows early exposure of pharmacy students to work environment despite their educational level, where they are charged with supervised responsibilities and training that match their knowledge and abilities at simulated pharmacy and clinical skills labs.

Other important aspects that are examined by the accrediting team are how the educational outcomes of different courses and training are assessed. The assessment methods must include, beside the traditional written exams, other types of assessments. Formative assessments that provide immediate evaluation of student understanding and abilities should be applied, as they allow faculties and preceptors to immediately stand on students understanding and acquired skills and to take corrective actions of their learning methods and training whenever necessary. On the other hand, the objective structured practical exam (OSCE) is another very important assessment method that must be applied in assessing clinical skills of students during their clerkships. Competency-based performance or assessment using suitable rubrics is the major tool for assessing pharmacy students where knowledge, skills and attitude are assessed. Thus, the accrediting team greatly helps and provides support for the pharmacy institutions under investigation to pay attention to specific and essential topics that guaranty proper preparation of pharmacy students to be pharmaceutical care practitioners and assure that all necessary requirements are applied and fulfilled before accreditation is granted.

Moreover, accrediting bodies are regularly and continuously evaluate accredited pharmacy programs to insure their continuous compliance to accreditation standards and policies. Ultimately, it could be concluded that looking for accreditation is not a luxury issue but it is

necessity for all pharmacy institutions to insure that their graduates will share effectively in providing reputable health care services to patients and society.