



## Fifty Shades of..... Pharmacy!

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Indeed our profession has morphed into such a multi-faceted entity that I have to really apply my mind if asked what all the different options for a career in pharmacy are.

If I think back to when I completed my studies and headed into the wide wide world of pharmacy, the options were far less than today! Yet... the challenges facing the young pharmacists entering the workplace are not that much different.

It is important to note that the training course for pharmacy students has changed and now also requires practice-based-learning to take place in their 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> years of study; in other words in the real world outside the confines of the Universities. Some universities have embarked on a number of Student-learning-programmes, where students are deployed in public sector workplaces. It is difficult to decide who learned the most, the student or the mentor (called the preceptor). This process itself could fully make up a pharmacist's CPD for the year, as the mutual learning is exactly what CPD is supposed to achieve.

Secondly, students have to find a place to do their Internship!

So what's the problem?

The main problem is that most pharmacists forget that if it was not for another, already qualified pharmacist, who pitied them and gave them the opportunity to complete their internship under their tutorship, they would also have suffered to enter the market. This cost their tutor time and money, although we were not paid much at the time!

The argument from pharmacists is usually, "I simply do not have the time" and "the whole exercise is too expensive" or "the exposure is too intense". Yet what if it was your child? Would you not want somebody to go the extra mile?

I do not understand how, as a profession, we became so self-centred and focused on financial gain that we are allowing the profession that feeds us, to bleed dry. There are always fingers pointed at others (often SAPC and PSSA) and there are always excuses for our own purported inabilities, but it is simply not good enough any longer. We need

to grow a backbone again and we need to do what is right, even if it costs us money. *We cannot complain that we cannot get or cannot afford locums, if we are the cause of the bottleneck in the turn-out of pharmacists from training facilities, ourselves.* Then we still point fingers at Government who is not in a position to employ all those who qualify as Community Service Pharmacists, even though they are doing their utmost to make sure that all are placed, somehow.

I think it is high-time to do some introspection! A colleague told me a while ago that he has trained a couple of pharmacist's assistants (PAs) and that they were worth nothing to him! I think it is quite shameful to make such an admission, because to my mind he admits that he has failed to train them properly! I have also been involved in the training of quite a few PAs (directly and indirectly) and most of them are worth their weight in gold whilst those who did not make the grade were not allowed to complete the course. We have a principle that we do not allow a sub-standard PA to enter the workforce, as I will not allow a colleague to unwittingly employ a bad apple that we trained. Most of those we trained were absorbed into different sectors to ours, yet we train PAs for the profession and not only for our personal need.

As a profession we often complain about the services rendered in Primary Health Care and that the standards have dropped. (I am not saying that I agree!) Are we not party to the decline in standards in that we do not find the time to assist in making health care accessible in those areas, either by giving some time without remuneration, as community outreach, or by training pharmacist's assistants to assist in the duties now carried out by nurses?

For those who are willing to invest time and effort into training of interns and assistants, and who are able to transfer, not only knowledge, but also passion, ethics and integrity to their trainees, it will be a most rewarding experience.

Colleagues, I think it is time for one and all to take our profession forward, and the way to do it is to make a concerted effort, that includes our time and money, to ensure a steady flow of well-trained PAs and interns into the pharmacy workforce.

When I look at the conference theme for 2018, **Fifty Shades of .....** **Pharmacy**, I come to wonder what happened to the passion for our profession whilst we were focusing on fifty shades of prosperity.

There can simply not be any excuses for not participating in training.