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Institut National de Santé Publique, d'Épidémiologie Clinique et de Toxicologie

**POLICY BRIEF**

**HEALTH PROFESSIONS AXIS - PHARMACY**

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**Title: Pharmacy Profession in Lebanon: From Education to Practice****Authors:** Sacre H, Hallit S, Hajj A, Aoun R, Saadeh D, Farah R, Salameh P**SUMMARY**

Like many other health professions, the pharmacy profession is constantly evolving, resulting in the emergence of new extended roles of the pharmacist, requiring new skills and competencies. In Lebanon, it is imperative to make adjustments to pharmacy education and practice to cope with these changes and optimize patient services in a cost-effective way; this is expected to significantly improve patient's health.

Based on evidence, INSPECT-LB produced recommendations regarding several aspects of the pharmaceutical system, starting from educational engineering to good pharmacy practice accreditation, to several other aspects including the recognition of specialized pharmacists, continuing education, patient profile, medication therapy management (MTM), medication safety programs, drug pricing, and the regulation of generic medications.

**POLICY IMPLICATIONS/MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE MINISTRY OF PUBLIC HEALTH**

- Endorse the core competencies' framework for pharmacists in Lebanon and disseminate it to universities that have pharmacy education programs.
- Endorse the post-graduate general and specialized competencies frameworks and disseminate them to universities that have advanced pharmacy education programs.
- Endorse researcher and preceptor competencies frameworks and disseminate them to universities that have pharmacy or post-pharmacy education programs.
- Endorse the pharmacy specialties titles and credentialing conditions.
- Endorse the Good Pharmacy Practice standards for community pharmacy practice accreditation and proceed with planning implementation (in collaboration with relevant stakeholders).
- Support the pharmacy education accreditation project already in progress with the Ministry of Education and Higher Education (in collaboration with academia).
- Discuss changes to the colloquium examination and support implementation of any law or process that would reduce the number of pharmacy graduates.
- Proceed with the medication safety and pharmacovigilance program, in collaboration with the Lebanese University and all professional orders.
- Proceed with the electronic Patient Profile project, and optimize it to reach Medication Therapy Management by the pharmacist in both community and hospital settings.
- Collaborate with professional orders to promote aspects of practice related to public health and community health (antibiotics resistance, dental care, smoking cessation, chronic diseases prevention, vaccination promotion, participation in research...).
- Optimize the pricing processes by initiating discussions with relevant authorities.
- Discuss generics approval and prescribing processes with relevant authorities.
- Discuss the current situation of hospital and clinical pharmacists and possible improvements in their practice.

## SUMMARY OF THE RESEARCH FINDINGS

### Introduction

The emergence of new roles of the pharmacists generated the need to organize the pharmaceutical sector, starting with the human resources transformation, as recommended by the World Health organization, and ending up with good pharmacy practice standards. The optimization of pharmacy education and practice is expected to have positive effects on patient's health.

### Background and Outcomes

In Lebanon, non-specialized pharmacy graduates are clearly in surplus, while pharmacy fields are becoming increasingly complex and demanding in terms of human resource competencies. Thus, pharmacy graduates' skills no longer match the needs of the market. Subsequently, a framework of core competencies for pharmacists was developed based on national needs and international guidelines, and suggested to universities that have pharmacy education programs.

Furthermore, another framework, related to post-graduate general and specialized competencies, was created. General competencies were coupled with appropriate activities that could be applied through a short post-graduate training in any pharmaceutical institution, while specialized competencies varied according to the field of specialty (hospital, community, marketing, industry...). Added to those were academic related competencies frameworks, e.g. for researcher and preceptor pharmacists, to be disseminated to universities that have pharmacy and post-pharmacy education programs. On the basis of their competencies and earned degrees, specialized pharmacists would therefore deserve recognition of their specialty title and credentials within both Ministries of Public Health (MOPH) and of Education and Higher Education (MEHE).

To improve the level of practice and reduce the number of non-specialized pharmacy graduates, several measures were suggested: changing and improving the colloquium examination process, enacting a law that would reduce the number of pharmacy graduates, and accrediting pharmacy programs. The pharmacy programs accreditation project was started in collaboration with the MEHE, academia, and the Lebanese Order of Pharmacists, and is expected to be implemented in 2020 in all universities.

From a community pharmacy practice point of view, a reflection was undertaken on the Good Pharmacy Practice (GPP) standards for community pharmacy; these GPP standards were written and published, and a rapid situation assessment was conducted to evaluate the readiness of community pharmacies in Lebanon for accreditation. The planning for implementing the standards can be started immediately.

Moreover, several other projects that were started jointly with the Lebanese Order of Pharmacists were completed and published:

The medication safety surveys conducted on pharmacists in the community and the hospital, and on the general population showed that the general population had little knowledge about their medications' safety, while pharmacists were ready to collaborate with relevant authorities to notify about adverse drug reactions. Thus, the pharmacovigilance program can be started as soon as possible. Pharmacists in both community and hospital settings, showed also they are ready to start with the electronic patient profile platform and the medication therapy management, although this activity is not rewarded at this stage.

As for the mandatory Continuing Education (CE) for pharmacists, surveys and official figures showed that the majority of pharmacists were engaging in CE activities (70%). Although they had preferences for clinical and pharmacological CE programs, they declared being ready to collaborate with the Lebanese Order of Pharmacists and other authorities (universities, ministry, ...) to promote aspects of practice related to public health and community health (antibiotics resistance, dental care, smoking cessation, chronic diseases prevention, vaccination promotion, participation in research...).

Research was also conducted regarding the current situation of community pharmacists (financial, professional and mental aspects) and hospital/clinical pharmacists (professional situation mainly).

Results showed that the financial situation of community pharmacists was deteriorating, leading to burnout and lack of empathy with patients, and a decreased quality of life; regarding hospital/clinical pharmacists, the results showed the need to have a clear job description with appropriate rights to their position in hospitals. Optimizing pricing processes and enacting professional laws in collaboration with competent authorities are suggested means to improve pharmacists' situation. Finally, a sample of generic medications was tested for content and found to be substandard. This prompts us to suggest a renewed policy for generics approval and prescribing processes, to be discussed with relevant stakeholders and approved by competent authorities.

## Conclusion

All aforementioned projects were conducted by the professional axis of INSPECT-LB; many other projects are already submitted to peer reviewed journals and some are still ongoing.

Members of INSPECT-LB professional axis are ready to discuss any of these suggestions with the Ministry of Public Health, and present all needed documents. Hoping that these efforts would optimize the professional practice and eventually, the patient's health.

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