

Media Release
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Patient's health interests most important factor when making ethical decisions

Pharmacy Practice Research Trust publish ethics in pharmacy practice report

A research report published by the Pharmacy Practice Research Trust (PPRT) provides evidence that ethics is present throughout the daily work of pharmacists and there was consensus amongst the profession about how ethical problems should be handled. Such consensus, says the report, implies that certain attitudes and ethical values are embedded in the culture of pharmacy practice.

Ethics in pharmacy practice is a report of a doctoral research study carried out by Dr Zuzana Deans at Keele University. Dr Deans is currently a Teaching and Research Associate at the Centre for Ethics in Medicine, University of Bristol.

The results show that pharmacists currently understand ethics as being a mixture of personal opinion, peer consensus, cultural influences and institutional rules. They take a 'patchwork' approach to ethics, relying on a combination of common sense, official guidance, strict rules, professional obligations and professional autonomy.

The majority of pharmacists across the profession who were involved in the study reported the patient's health interests as the most important factor to consider in ethical decision making. The research also indicated that regulation seems to play a very important part in moral decision making. When asked to rank the level of consideration they gave to certain factors when faced with an ethical problem, pharmacists ranked consideration of the law, RPSGB guidelines, their reputation and the risk of being struck off more highly than the patient's non-health interests.

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Says Dr Deans: “The research indicated that pharmacists tend to be dutiful in regard to institutional rules but are sometimes willing to break them when the interests of the patient are considered to outweigh the possible negative consequences of breaking the law. The findings of this research provide evidence that ethical problem-solving is an important part of the ‘job description’ of pharmacists. While it is already clear that ethics plays a significant role in the consciousness of the professional body and the regulator, there is evidence that ethics is also a prominent feature at the practice level.

Practising pharmacy means not only applying technical knowledge about medicines and physiology but also using skills to understand and work with patients as persons. A natural line for further investigation would be to determine the extent of pharmacists’ awareness, knowledge and understanding of ethics.”

Commenting on the research findings, Joy Wingfield, Professor of Pharmacy Law and Ethics at The University of Nottingham said: “It is heartening that the “common sense” ethical values embedded in pharmacy practice ensure that patients’ interests remain paramount. However, to meet the moral challenges of future health care pharmacists will need an even more firm grasp of ethical principles, rational decision making and ethical literacy to keep pace”.

The report can be view on the PPRT website at:

http://www.pprt.org.uk/Documents/Ethics_in_Pharmacy_Practice_200910.pdf

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Notes to editors:

1. *Ethics in pharmacy practice*, Dr Zuzana Deans, Research Associate, Centre for Ethics in Medicine, University of Bristol, Pharmacy Practice Research Trust 2010.
ISBN: 9780956332332 http://www.pprt.org.uk/Documents/Ethics_in_Pharmacy_Practice_200910.pdf
2. The research was commissioned by the Royal Pharmaceutical Society of GB and overseen by the Pharmacy Practice Research Trust and is based upon research undertaken for a PhD (Deans 2008).
3. The Pharmacy Practice Research Trust
The Pharmacy Practice Research Trust was established by the Royal Pharmaceutical Society of GB in July 1999 as an independent research charity with a broad objective to promote and develop the field of pharmacy practice research. Its trustees are drawn from senior health policy makers, leading academics, industry and retailers. The Trust has invested around £2m in research; 30% supporting capacity building in pharmacy practice research and 70% on commissioned research. It receives financial support from the Leverhulme Trade Charities Trust and the Galen Trust, as well as a gift in kind from the Royal Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain. For further information and to access reports of Trust commissioned research or for funding/grant opportunities go to: www.pprt.org.uk

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