

The Pharmacy Practice Research Trust



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Ethics in pharmacy practice report calls for reorientation of core values

The current values and ethics of pharmacy practitioners provide a solid base for practice, with pharmacy emerging as a highly responsible and conscientious profession says a report published today by the Pharmacy Practice Research Trust. However, a reorientation of the core values of pharmacy practice is recommended.

The report is based on a research study which set out to explore and map the values and ethics of pharmacy practitioners through their self-reported day-to-day perceptions and experiences. It identifies two core values, *respect for medicines* and *the patient's best interests* as central to the way ethical components within professional activities are currently managed and understood. The findings suggest that greater ethical and values literacy would make an important contribution to the pharmacy profession in two respects. Firstly, by directly supporting new and developing practice activities and responsibilities and secondly, by helping the profession to maintain and develop its broader contribution to society including medicines and health-related policy making.

“There is an increasing recognition by the wider health community of the central role ethics and particularly values and value judgments play in decision making in patient care” says Marshall Davies, Chairman of the Pharmacy Practice Research Trust. “However, ethics is an area of research which is significantly underdeveloped in pharmacy. This is particularly so at a time when the professional role of pharmacy is evolving and health care delivery itself is changing with greater emphasis on shared care, patient autonomy, the extension of community based health care delivery and increasing cultural diversity of both patients and health care practitioners.”

In recognition of this and following the Royal Pharmaceutical Society's discussion paper '*Developing Pharmacy Values*', the Pharmacy Practice Research Trust has supported two PhD studentships to identify professional values and ethical issues including ethical dilemmas faced by pharmacists in their day to day practice and across the different sectors of pharmacy.

Ailsa Benson was awarded one of the PhD studentships, funded by the Royal Pharmaceutical Society, and is co-author, along with Alan Cribb and Nick Barber, of the report entitled '*Respect for Medicines and Respect for People*' published by the PPRT today.

The report discusses key concepts seen by practitioners as associated with ethics including altruism, confidentiality, privacy, paternalism, and trust in relationships with patients and other healthcare professionals. Ethical dilemmas identified and discussed include those arising from interprofessional conflicts or from tensions between personal, professional and institutional values, resource allocation decisions and value judgements in the face of actual or potential errors.

"It is essential pharmacists maintain their place within health care and that they have the facility to engage with its inevitable ethical and values dimensions," say the research team. "We recommend that over time, the core values of pharmacy practice should be slightly reoriented and suggest that the values associated with *respect for medicines* should continue to be fostered and practiced, albeit with some refinements. However, there is a need to shift the emphasis from a concern with the *patient's best interests* towards the value of *respect for people*."

Professor Sheila McLean, Director of the Institute of Law & Ethics in Medicine, Glasgow University says in the Foreword to the report, "this is a fascinating and balanced report. It presents a challenging account of pharmacy practice and makes powerful recommendations which can only enhance the reputation of this important strand of health provision and its practitioners."

“The Society was pleased to support this research,” says Doug Simpson, Chairman of the Law and Ethics Committee. “It is an opportune time to publish this report as the Royal Pharmaceutical Society is currently reviewing its Code of Ethics and these findings underline the importance of the Code and the need to keep it fit for purpose”.

The report entitled *Respect for medicines and respect for people: mapping pharmacist practitioners’ perceptions and experiences of ethics and values* is available at <http://www.rpsgb.org/informationresources/downloadsocietypublications/> or by contacting Beth Allen, Research Programme Co-ordinator (email: beth.allen@rpsgb.org Tel: 020 7572 2466).

Notes for editors:

1. The PhD research was completed at the Centre for Public Policy Research, King’s College London and the related report authored by Dr. Ailsa Benson (Email: ailsabenson@enterprise.net), Professor Alan Cribb (email: alan.cribb@kcl.ac.uk tel: 020 7872 3151) and Professor Nick Barber (email: n.barber@pharmacy.ac.uk tel: 020 7874 1271).

2. Professor Sheila McLean is International Bar Association Professor of Law and Ethics in Medicine and Director of the Institute of Law & Ethics in Medicine, Glasgow University.

3. Synopsis of study methodology

A qualitative interview study was conducted amongst 38 pharmacists to explore and map their perceptions of ethics and values through self-reported experiences within their day-to-day professional activities. The practitioners represented a range of practice roles, employment status and geographical situations but excluded those working within pharmaceutical industry. The interviews were recorded, transcribed and analysed according to the principles of grounded theory. They were conducted during the period March 2003 to November 2004.

4. Main recommendations

The central recommendation arising from the research is that the profession should aim to develop practitioners' ethical and values literacy so as to:

- Improve the identification and management of ethical and value components within day-to-day practice dilemmas and decisions;
- Strengthen the requisite skill set, for example, those relating to managing conflicts between professional and patient autonomy, or between professional responsibilities to the patient and to the wider public;
- Promote greater respect for the values of patients and other health care professionals; and
- Enhance the contribution pharmacists make to shared decision-making, whether in the care of an individual patient or in policy discussions

5. The Pharmacy Practice Research Trust

The Pharmacy Practice Trust was established 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 amongst senior health policy makers, leading academics, industrialists and retailers.

The *Medicines and People* programme is a major initiative by the Trust. As an independent research charity, the Trust aims to promote research that will enable policy makers, manufacturers, prescribers and others to better understand the people and the contexts in which they use and take medicines.

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