How to Help First-Year Pharmacy Students to Gain the Big Picture

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Background: Many first-year students arrive at university unprepared for study. It is difficult for them to overcome the big gaps between high school and the university first year, and they cannot capture the big picture of the whole MPharm program until the final year. They also have little knowledge about their future job as pharmacists.

Methods: In this study, we aimed to develop a new teaching method to help the first-year MPharm students to understand the structure and main contents of the whole program, the requirements of the future job (pharmacist) and to develop their personal plan for next four-year study. In the autumn of 2012, pre-test and post-test assessment questionnaires were sent to 150 first-year students at one UK Pharmacy School before and after first-year professional development courses. Students' responses in the pre-test and post-test were compared to assess the influence of the professional development courses. This research assessed the school's endeavour to implement an inter-disciplinary, active learning, professional development course in the first year of MPharm program.

Results: In our survey, 140 students responded to the pre-test, while 130 responses were obtained in the post-test. (Overall response rate 88%). The responses indicated that the professional development courses had a positive influence on students' professional development. All the post-test scores were higher than the pre-test scores. The results toward a pharmacist's role and the duties of the pharmacist clearly showed the significant improvement under exposure to the professional development module. Moreover, about 70% of students understood the structure of MPharm, while only 40% of them knew it at the beginning. Results also showed that the professional development course further improved the understanding of job duties and learning attitude of first-year students.

Conclusions: A new teaching method had successfully developed to improve first-year pharmacy students' attitudes toward to the role of the pharmacists and learning motivation in MPharm program. This inter-disciplinary course also provides a model to other pharmacy programs in the UK and the world.