Pharmacy and Faith Can Intersect

by Marc A. Sweeney PharmD, MDiv
Professor and Dean
Cedarville University
Cedarville, Ohio

The Need for a Solid Foundation

The profession of pharmacy is a multi-faceted discipline, requiring an understanding of pathophysiology, patient assessment, pharmacology, pharmacokinetics and pharmacotherapy in the context of patient care. To provide appropriate patient care, knowledge of the disease being treated and the optimal medication, dose, and route of administration used for treatment is necessary. Optimization of medication therapy is not simply based upon the medication's physicochemical properties, but more importantly the patient and related considerations. Often the choice of medication for a patient is based upon a prescriber perspective rather than the patient perspective.

For example, the most effective medication to treat a specific disease might require the patient to assume a high cost, high frequency, or large dosage form. As a result, the patient may not take every dose, compromising the efficacy, because efficacy is based upon the premise that the patient actually consumes or applies the medication. Determining the most appropriate medication needs to take into account the patient's perspectives, lifestyle, beliefs, financial implications in addition to concomitant diseases, and prescription and non-prescription medications. Conversely, some patients are prescribed medications that result in fostering medication misuse. According to the World Health Organization, medication misuse now exceed the mortality rates for illicit drug use.

Appropriate patient care requires that the patient is the starting point for treatment considerations. Four medication misuse or adherence issues should be avoided. In order to optimize patient-centered medication treatment plans, four primary building blocks to professional pharmacy education are needed: 1. Foundational Sciences (biomedical, pharmacoeconomic) 2. Behavioral, social and administrative sciences 3. Clinical sciences 4. Literature and research evaluation skills

Each area requires that the pharmacist be a critical evaluator of information, such that validity of information is considered. However, these building blocks are common to most professional pharmacy programs. At Cedarville University, a foundation for the building blocks is also used. The foundation of the Scriptures as a basis, by which all other information is validated, is essential to creating future pharmacists who seek out the possible patient care information that is learned or generated through the school's research is first aligned with the truth of Scripture. According to 2 Timothy 3:16 (NIV), All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. The Scriptures are intended to transform people into the likeness of Christ. Therefore, a follower of Christ should desire to filter all scientific literature through God's Word before embracing its potential truth.

The Foundation of Scripture

When literature or scientific evidence is evaluated against the entirety of Scriptures, diligent study and analysis of the Scriptures are keys to appropriate interpretation. Scriptures taken out of context to endorse a specific view undermine the validity and greater value of Scripture. The Scriptures provide basis by which information may be interpreted. Since all information and research may be fallible, an infallible source maintains accountability and grounding to truth. To be an exceptional clinician, researcher and teacher, a faculty member must be praying over the Scriptures and God’s revelation of truth through His Word. As a faculty member uses the foundation of Scriptures for all areas of research, teaching and practice, their investment into the development of exceptional, patient-focused pharmacists may be truly realized.

Compassion and care for the patient must also include assisting patients in making the right decisions. Many patients desire guidance in difficult, ethical decisions. The existing health care system does not provide any foundation by which to make tough choices. Patients may struggle with deciding to abort a baby through medication use, whether to use high dose pain medication at the end of life, or the ethical implications of using the ‘morning after pill.’ It may be difficult to make decisions about the use of antidepressants, anxiolytics or antipsychotics. They may have questions about substituting a “natural” remedy for conventional psychopharmaceuticals. They may also have questions about substituting a “natural” remedy for conventional psychopharmaceuticals. They may also have questions about substituting a “natural” remedy for conventional psychopharmaceuticals.

The love of the Scriptures and mediation on Scriptures provides insight and understanding. Simple knowledge of Scriptures, which Satan possesses, does not have the same outcome. Thus, a faculty member must be truly aligned with the Scriptures and God’s revelation of truth through His Word.

A proper understanding of our relationship with God is the starting place for understanding. If any of you lack wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him (James 1:5, NIV).

The love of the Scriptures and meditation on Scriptures provides insight and understanding. Simple knowledge of Scriptures, which Satan possesses, does not have the same outcome. Thus, a faculty member must demonstrate their love and desire for God's Word.

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge... (Proverbs 1:7, NIV).

Applying the Scriptures to the Profession

In order for integration of the Christian faith into the profession of pharmacy, diligent study of both is required. If a lack of knowledge, understanding or comprehension of the profession or the Scriptures is lacking, then the fullness of the potential will not be realized. For example, if a pharmacist in good standing is fully-versed in God's Word and is being transformed into the likeness of Christ on a daily basis, but has not been maintaining current

The source of all of our power to impact this world is through Christ. The implications of this passage are beyond the realms of this discussion. However, the truth of this passage is a key foundation to teaching and role modeling work in pharmacy.

Daily transformation and the renewing of the faculty member's mind and heart (Romans 12:2) needs to be starting point for teaching. When there is a disconnection between what is taught and what is lived on the part of the teacher, outcomes are compromised. An atheist can communicate the truths of Scripture as information, but a follower of Christ needs to communicate the truths of Scripture as transformation.

When literature or scientific evidence is evaluated against the entirety of Scriptures, diligent study and analysis of the Scriptures are keys to appropriate interpretation. Scriptures taken out of context to endorse a specific view undermine the validity and greater value of Scripture. The Scriptures provide basis by which information may be interpreted. Since all information and research may be fallible, an infallible source maintains accountability and grounding to truth. To be an exceptional clinician, researcher and teacher, a faculty member must be praying over the Scriptures and God’s revelation of truth through His Word. As a faculty member uses the foundation of Scriptures for all areas of research, teaching and practice, their investment into the development of exceptional, patient-focused pharmacists may be truly realized.
upon the premise that the patient ac-
the efficacy, because efficacy is based
require the patient to assume a high
cation to treat a specific disease might
versely, some patients are prescribed
cations. Often the choice
.icochemical properties, but more
of medication therapy is not simply
ary of pathophysiology,
ent, assessment, pharmacology,
pharmacokinetics and pharma-
ng future pharmacists who seek out
ition is validated, is essential to creat-
the foundation of the Scriptures as
for the building blocks is also used.
Each area requires that the pharma-
each require that the pharma-
 such that validity of infor-
 consideration is required. However, these
building blocks are common to most
pharmacy education are needed: 1. Foun-
damental Sciences (biomedical, phar-
macucatal) 2. Behavioral, social and
it all day long. Your commands make
first aligned with the truth of Scripture.
 According to 2 Timothy 3:16 (NIV), All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness,
so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good
The Scriptures are intended to transform people into the likeness of Christ. Therefore, a follower of Christ should desire to filter all scientific li-
the love of Christ to others. In the middle of any difficult deci-
sion, the possibility exists to encour-
age patients to admit to their strugg-
gles, tears and concerns. With every
The love of the Scriptures and medi-
tion on Scriptures provides insight
The following Scriptures are paramount
Compassion and care for the patient
The implications of this passage are
The source of all of our power to im-
there is a disconnection between what
and heart (Romans 12:2) needs to
The fear of the Lord is the beginning of
A proper understanding of our re-
If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all
asking God for wisdom is a starting

The Need for a Solid Foundation

The profession of pharmacy is a multi-faceted discipline, requiring an understanding of pathophysiology, patient assessment, pharmacology, pharmacokinetics and pharmacotherapy in the context of patient care. To provide appropriate patient care, knowledge of the disease being treated and the optimal medication, dose, and route of administration used for treatment is necessary. Optimization of medication therapy is not simply based upon the medication’s phys-
mental properties, but more importantly the patient and relat-
considerations. Often the choice of medication for a patient is based
upon a prescriber perspective rather than the patient perspective.
For example, the most effective medi-
cation to treat a specific disease might require the patient to assume a high cost, high frequency, or large dosage form. As a result, the patient may not take every dose, compromising the efficacy, because efficacy is based upon the premise that the patient ac-
tually consumes or applies the med-

Appropriate patient care requires that the patient is the starting point for treatment consideration. Four medication misuse or adherence is-
should be avoided. In order to optimize patient-centered medica-
treatment plans, four primary building blocks to professional phar-
acy education are needed: 1. Found-
damental Sciences (biomedical, phar-
macucatal) 2. Behavioral, social and
administration sciences 3. Clinical
sciences 4. Literature and research eval-

Each area requires that the pharma-
cist be a critical evaluator of infor-
mation, such that validity of infor-

Compassion and care for the patient
must also include assisting patients in making the right decisions. Many pa-
tients desire guidance in difficult, eth-
ical decisions. The existing health care system does not provide any founda-
tion by which to make tough choices. Patients may struggle with deciding to abort a baby through medica-
tion use, whether to use high dose
medication at the end of life, or the
ethical implications of using the
“morning after pill.” It may be dif-
ficult for some to make decisions
about the use of antidepressants, anxi-
olytics or antipsychotics. They may have questions about substituting a
“natural” remedy for conventional
therapy. Many health care profession-
als are ill-equipped to guide patients in these difficult decision-making processes. Regardless of the patient’s spiritual or religious background, patients gener-
ally want some basis to make a deci-
sion. Providing scientific data alone is
usually not enough to guide patients.

Scientific data based on the founda-
tion of Scriptural truth provides a
great backdrop for decision making,
even for the atheist. The foundation
of information is based upon a great-
truth. Scriptural truth has been
validated over the entire course of
human history, but scientific “truth” may
only have a few years of validi-
ty. Furthermore, all challenging deci-
sion results in opportunities to dem-
strate the love of Christ to others.

The love of the Scriptures and med-
tion on Scriptures provides insight
understanding. Simple knowl-
edge of Scriptures, which Satan pos-
sesses, does not have the same out-
come. Thus, a faculty member must
demonstrate their love and desire
for God’s Word.

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of
knowledge... (Proverbs 1:7, NIV).

A proper understanding of our re-
relationship with God is the starting
place for understanding.
knowledge and understanding of new drug therapy or treatment guidelines, then the care of the patient will be inadequate. The most caring, compassionate, Christ-like individual must still have the necessary skills and knowl-
edge to deliver appropriate pharmacist care. On the other
hand, a pharmacist who is noted in their individual spe-
cialty may not be able to provide the necessary navigation of ethical decisions or even think to sacrifice their own comfort to care for others without the ongoing renewing of their mind through the Spirit-directed study of Scrip-
tures.

Just as Paul was known, first, as a slave or servant of Christ, so should all followers of Christ. An individual’s identity should not be rooted in their career or role within their society or family. A Christian’s identity should start with servitude to Christ. In other words, an individual should not be known as a pharmacist, who happens to be a Christian, but a Christian, who happens to be a phar-
macist. Practically, when a patient or health professional interacts with a pharmacist, it is their expertise that draws the interaction. However, ultimately, Christ should radi-
ate through and eventually become their primary identity. A Christian pharmacist once said, “I have found that people need me more than they need my product.”

As a pharmacist becomes primarily identified as a follower of Christ, others should note a different type of practitio-
er. According to Galatians 5:22-23 (NIV), “…the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, good-
ness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control…” Because the description of this passage is in singular form, the fol-
lower of Christ would demonstrate all of these character-
istics on a regular basis. A practitioner, who truly loves others as an outflow of his or her love for God while em-
bracing a genuine joy regardless of his or her circumstanc-
es, will be noticeable. Further manifestations of the Spirit
will be part of the development of skills. Attitudes, an indi-
vidual’s degree of like or dislike, are created through the whole process. As a follower of Christ, the faculty mem-
ber should shape the attitude of learning by instilling into
learners a motivation to learn about God’s creation. The faculty member should like what they do and be passion-
ate towards Christ and His calling in his or her life. The faculty member should desire to serve others in a tangible
way in the profession of pharmacy. Many times, what is “caused” is more impactful than what is “caught”. As par-ents, children often embrace who we are and how we act rather than what we say. Extrapolation to students could also make me. A faculty member’s passion for Christ and desire to serve others will create momentum and desire to do the same. God, the Father, informed His people about his expectations for life, but Jesus role modeled what that life looked like.

Beyond the role modeling of the faculty members, the fac-
ulty member should embrace Scriptural inclusion, when appropriate, into their discipline. In pharmacy, it can be applied in patient care areas, missions, science foundations, ethics, etc. Because new drug therapy and research in ar-
eas of pharmacogenomics can create new areas of ethical concern, the opportunities to integrate Scripture into areas continue to be dynamic. In fact, with over 20,000 new arti-
cles published monthly in health care, it is unlikely that any faculty member will deliver the same material twice from year to year. This provides opportunity to constantly evalu- ate the impact of Scripture on new information.

Pedagogical Implications

The task of training up Christians who are pharmacists is no easy undertaking. Developing an entire school of pharmacy with this mission is challenging. The plan be-
gins with faculty members who embrace living for Christ as a pharmacist. Faculty members must work through what this looks like, personally and professionally, to be able to effectively teach and be a role model. Teaching the philosophical tenets of being a Christian pharmacist will not have much impact. However, embracing the notion of discipleship, “come follow me as I follow Christ,” has life changing implications.

All pharmacists are trained in knowledge, skills and atti-
udes based upon accreditation standards. Bloom’s Taxon-
omy of cognition (identified in 1956 by Benjamin Bloom) ranks knowledge as the lowest level of cognition. Build-
ing off of knowledge is understanding, application, anal-
ysis, synthesis and evaluation. Each of these areas would

References

2. Food and Drug Administration. Combating misuse and abuse of prescription drugs: Q&A with Michael
Klein, PhD. http://www.fda.gov/ForConsumers/Cons-
umerUpdates/ucm220112.htm, accessed 21 November
2011.

Marc A. Sweeney, Pharm.D., M.Div., is a Professor and
Dean of the Cedarville University School of Pharmacy. He
completed his B.S. in Pharmacy from Ohio Northern Uni-
versity, his Pharm.D. from The Ohio State University and
his M.Div. from Southwest Bible College and Seminary. He
also completed an Academic Leadership Fellowship at Ohio
University College of Osteopathic Medicine.
knowledge and understanding of new drug therapy or treatment guidelines, then the care of the patient will be inadequate. The most caring, compassionate, Christ-like individual must still have the necessary skills and knowledge to deliver appropriate pharmacist care. On the other hand, a pharmacist who is noted in their individual specialty may not be able to provide the necessary navigation of ethical decisions or even think to sacrifice their own comfort to care for others without the ongoing renewing of their mind through the Spirit-directed study of Scripture.

Just as Paul was known, first, as a slave or servant of Christ, so should all followers of Christ. An individual’s identity should not be rooted in their career or role within their society or family. A Christian’s identity should start with their servitude to Christ. In other words, an individual should not be known as a pharmacist, who happens to be a Christian, but a Christian, who happens to be a pharmacist. Practically, when a patient or health professional interacts with a pharmacist, it is their expertise that draws the interaction. However, ultimately, Christ should radiate through and eventually become their primary identity. A Christian pharmacist once said, “I have found that people need me more than they need my product.”

As a pharmacist becomes primarily identified as a follower of Christ, others should note a different type of practice. According to Galatians 5:22-23 (NIV), “...the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control...” Because the description of this passage is in singular form, the follower of Christ would demonstrate all of these characteristics on a regular basis. A practitioner, who truly loves others as an outflow of his or her love for God while embracing a genuine joy regardless of his or her circumstances, will be noticeable. Further manifestations of the Spirit create more differentiations between a Christian pharmacist and a non-Christian pharmacist.

According to Romans 12:10 (ESV), followers of Christ should “…out one another in showing honor.” How might a pharmacist come across to others if they were committed to competing with others in giving honor? What if every action was evaluated based on honoring those whom they serve? Every employer wants to hire individuals who are known for honoring others. It is a great business model and a great success model. However, the end-point is not honor, in and of itself, but to give glory to God. If every action is rooted in the question, “are my actions resulting in more individuals desiring Christ?” This might result in revival. Honor is not dependent upon the other person’s beliefs or disbeliefs. It is easy to honor those who agree with us, but what if the individual holds a different view? A Christian pharmacist holds truth, but always honors those with whom they serve. When King Solomon, known for His gift of wisdom, was visited by Queen of Sheba, she proclaimed, “…praise be to the Lord your God, who has delighted in you and placed you on the throne of Israel…” (1 Kings 10:9, NIV).

God was truly honored when Solomon gave glory to God for His gift of wisdom that he gave as a gift to others. Imagine if Christian pharmacists were to be good stewards of the wisdom that God has given them? Could Christian pharmacists actually provide guidance or solutions to the most challenging issues or questions that people or society faces? Could Christian pharmacists be a source for answers to a hurting world? Every patient who enters the pharmacy (or the health system) has a physical need. That physical need is the starting point where Jesus began His ministry. Many times, spiritual needs are not realized until the physical needs are being met.

Ultimately, the Christian, who embraces the health care system as their mission field through the profession of pharmacy, should be an individual who brings glory to God through his or her actions and tongue. Furthermore, that individual should be able to communicate truth in an honoring and loving manner that places God first and their patient second, regardless of the situation. Pedagogical Implications

The task of training up Christians who are pharmacists is no easy undertaking. Developing an entire school of pharmacy with this mission is challenging. The plan begins with faculty members who embrace living for Christ as a pharmacist. Faculty members must work through what this looks like, personally and professionally, to be able to effectively teach and be a role model. Teaching the philosophical tenets of being a Christian pharmacist will not have much impact. However, embracing the notion of discipleship, “come follow me as I follow Christ,” has life changing implications.

All pharmacists are trained in knowledge, skills and attitudes based upon accreditation standards. Bloom’s Taxonomy of cognition (identified in 1956 by Benjamin Bloom) ranks knowledge as the lowest level of cognition. Building off of knowledge is understanding, application, analysis, synthesis and evaluation. Each of these areas would be part of the development of skills. Attitudes, an individual’s degree of like or dislike, are created through the whole process. As a follower of Christ, the faculty member should shape the attitude of learning by instilling into learners a motivation to learn about God’s creation. The faculty member should like what they do and be passionate towards Christ and His calling in his or her life. The faculty member should desire to serve others in a tangible way in the profession of pharmacy. Many times, what is “caught” is more impactful than what is “taught”. As parents, children often embrace who we are and how we act rather than what we say. Extrapolation to students could also be made. A faculty member’s passion for Christ and desire to serve others will create momentum and desire to do the same. God, the Father, informed His people about His expectations for life, but Jesus role modeled what that life looked like.

Beyond the role modeling of the faculty members, the faculty member should embrace Scriptural inclusion, when appropriate, into their discipline. In pharmacy, it can be applied in patient care areas, missions, science foundations, ethics, etc. Because new drug therapy and research in areas of pharmacogenomics can create new areas of ethical concern, the opportunities to integrate Scripture into areas continue to be dynamic. In fact, with over 20,000 new articles published monthly in health care, it is unlikely that any faculty member will deliver the same material twice from year to year. This provides opportunity to constantly evaluate the impact of Scripture on new information.

Personal Testimony

With each month that passes, God is challenging me in new ways. I am always looking for new ways to have an impact on people, make the Gospel real and encourage a hurting world through the truths of our Creator. I am hopeful my perspective integrating my faith into my teaching will become more dynamic through continued collaboration and engagement of my Cedarville University colleagues.

References


Marc A. Sawyer, Pharm.D., M.Div., is a Professor and Dean of the Cedarville University School of Pharmacy. He completed his B.S. in Pharmacy from Ohio Northern University, his M.Div. from The Ohio State University and his M.Div. from Southwest Bible College and Seminary. He also completed an Academic Leadership Fellowship at Ohio University College of Osteopathic Medicine.