

The Value of a Christian Pharmacy Education and its Impact on Developing Future Pharmacists Who are Servant Leaders

By Pakou Vang

As of July 2017, there are 138 accredited colleges and schools of pharmacy, according to the American Association of Colleges of Pharmacy (AACP),¹ a number that has nearly doubled since the early 90's. The number of pharmacy schools in the United States has progressively grown over the years and continues to expand. Data from previous studies consistently report that more than 20% of the schools/colleges are faith-based^{2, 3, 4} some of which include: Belmont University College of Pharmacy (TN), Campbell University College of Pharmacy (NC), Cedarville University School of Pharmacy (OH), Concordia University Wisconsin School of Pharmacy (WI), Harding University College of Pharmacy (AK), Loma Linda University School of Pharmacy (CA), Palm Beach Atlantic University Lloyd L. Gregory School of Pharmacy (FL), Samford University McWhorter School of Pharmacy (AL), Union University School of Pharmacy (TN) and Wingate University School of Pharmacy (NC). All of the institutions previously mentioned provide a quality pharmacy education, and some intentionally integrate Christian principles into their pharmacy education. This unique learning environment fosters not only personal and professional growth, but also spiritual growth as students pursue their pharmacy degree. In addition, students are surrounded by a community of learners and faculty in which Christian ideals guide their approach to patient care.

Why is it important to have faith-integration in pharmacy education? In any health care setting, patients should be the top priority and providers have an obligation to provide the highest quality of care to optimize outcomes. Patients should not be regarded as numbers to be screened through or boxes to check off, but should be cared for as whole persons. Not only do they have physical ailments that require medical attention from professionals, but also a vast array of other needs that must be considered. A holistic care model implies that all areas of wellness are addressed, including the patient's spiritual needs. Pharmacists are the medication experts and uniquely positioned to provide direct patient care especially considering the expansion out of the traditional dispensing role. Pharmacists are more accessible and have opportunities to interact with patients more frequently than other health care providers. Integration of faith into pharmacy education instills (or at the very least, introduces) fundamental values to students that will enable them to care for patients holistically as a student pharmacist and in their future practice as a pharmacist. To be the hands and feet of Christ is to lead with a servant heart, be selfless and compassionate, and exemplify the character of Christ as we care for our patients. It is only through a Christ-like attitude that we will be able to meet the demands of the profession. Undoubtedly, there will be times in which the workload could affect morale, and our faith in Christ will be what carries us through when the work becomes challenging.

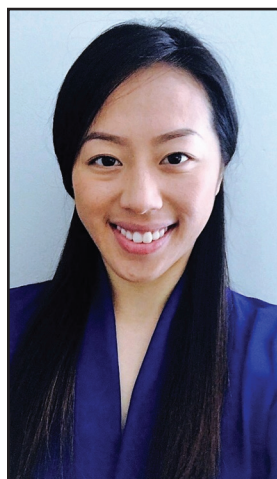
Throughout the New Testament, the Apostle Paul is the greatest example of proclaiming the Gospel and Jesus is the ultimate example of a servant leader full of love and compassion for all. In Mark 16:15 and Matthew 28:19 (ESV), Christ calls us to "go into all the world and proclaim the Gospel" and "make disciples of all nations".⁵ Often, when the topic of missions gets tossed around, many people immediately visualize boarding a plane and traveling thousands of miles overseas to a developing country to help those who are less fortunate. While overseas medical mission trips are of great value, it is also important to consider the impact that we can have in our own communities. How

can we effectively minister to the outside world, when we aren't actively serving our own neighbors or those in our own backyards? Many times we want to do something grand for God... and we mistakenly believe that unless we go on an international mission trip, then we aren't truly making an impact. In my journey of pursuing a career in pharmacy, I am reminded daily that my highest calling is to be an ambassador for Christ and that my mission field need not be overseas in a developing country, but it is here and now: being a faithful steward of the gifts God has already entrusted to me, and making myself available to be used by Him wherever I am, with what I know; trusting that whatever I lack, He will provide.

A Christian pharmacist can play a significant role in serving God through patient-centered care because they are motivated beyond themselves. The key driver is not in record keeping of personal achievements, but rather an earnest desire to honor God through pharmacy practice and to impact patient lives. As a future pharmacist, I believe that a firm foundation in Christ is necessary for me to not only provide exceptional medical care to my patients, but also to minister to their spiritual needs. At graduation, every successful student will be conferred a Doctor of Pharmacy degree; however it is the individual's qualities and character that will set him or her apart from the crowd. It is my Christian pharmacy education, through the work of the Holy Spirit, that is refining my character and helping me become a servant leader to better serve my patients in the future.

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