

## Feature Article

# The Development of the Discipline of Social and Administrative Pharmacy at Universiti Sains Malaysia

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## Introduction

In recent years, the role of the pharmacist has changed tremendously. Patients' health care and cost of disease treatments played a major role in redefining the pharmacist roles toward patient care. The field of Social and Administrative Pharmacy (SAP) has been fueled by the ever scarce resources in the health care area, applied approaches from management, economics, epidemiology, informatics, marketing and the social sciences to matters related to pharmacy and health care.

SAP encourages collaboration between pharmacists and other specialists in many different areas. Research in SAP would provide health and policy makers valued information related to new and existing medications, comparing between different health programs, health policy decisions, rationale use of medicines, pharmacoepidemiology and pharmaco-economic studies and many other health related studies.

## Brief History of Discipline of Social and Administrative Pharmacy (DSAP)

In 1986, the idea of introducing a new area in the pharmacy curriculum was mooted by the current vice chancellor of Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM) Prof. Dato' Dzulkifli Abdul Razak who was a lecturer at the school of pharmacy during that period. The program started with introducing a 2 unit elective course in social pharmacy - 'Drugs in Developing Countries' into the curriculum in the late 80s. Then in 1991 Mohamed Izham Mohamed Ibrahim, a former USM graduate was selected by the university to pursue his studies in the area of Social and Administrative Pharmacy. He then obtained his PhD from the Philadelphia College of Pharmacy & Science, USA in 1995.

In 2001, new courses related to Social and Administrative Pharmacy was included into the curriculum of the undergraduate program and a new discipline, Social and Administrative Pharmacy, became part of the pharmacy program. In 2002 and 2003, Mohamad

Azmi Ahmad Hassali and Asrul Akmal Shafie went to Australia and UK, respectively to pursue their PhD studies in the field of Social Pharmacy. Upon PhD graduation in 2006, Mohamed Azmi returned to the school as an academic staff member and was followed by Asrul in 2007. In December 2006, Zaheer Ud-Din Babar (obtained his PhD degree from Universiti Sains Malaysia) joined the discipline from University College Sedaya International. Finally in August 2008, the discipline managed to add Mahmoud Al-Haddad as a lecturer upon the completion of his PhD studies under the supervision of Mohamed Izham Mohamed Ibrahim.

#### **Where is DSAP now?**

At the moment, DSAP includes four full time lecturers, one honorary lecturer, two supporting staff and three fellowship holders to support the teaching and research at DSAP. DSAP offers seven different courses within the undergraduate B.Pharm program. These courses are Statistics for Pharmacy, Public Health Pharmacy, Pharmacy Management, Pharmaceutical Marketing, Pharmacoinformatics, Pharmacoepidemiology and Pharmacoconomics.

The disciplines academic staff is also actively engaged in teaching M.Pharm (Clinical Pharmacy) and PhD programs in clinical pharmacy. Since its establishment, DSAP has successfully managed to produce 14 masters and 6 PhD graduates. Now there are more than 50 Masters and PhD students from twelve different countries undertaking

their research in the areas of Socio-behavioral aspects of Health and Medicine Use, Pharmacoconomics, Pharmacoepidemiology, Pharmaceutical Policy, Pharmacy Management, Pharmaceutical Marketing, Pharmacoinformatics, Pharmacy Practice & System Research, Public Health Pharmacy, Drug Financing & Quality of Life studies. Until now, academic staff and research students at DSAP have published more than 50 peer-reviewed articles, 100 other articles, seven books and had produced more than 40 QOL instruments in Malay, Mandarin and English through the Linguistic Validation process.

The discipline has also created linkages with The World Health Organisation (WHO), Health Action International (HAI), research Institutes, universities and health/pharmacy organizations in countries like Sudan, Yemen, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Nepal and Australia, as well as government agencies and NGOs in Malaysia. Moreover, lecturers at DSAP successfully managed to get three international grants from WHO, WHO/HAI and HAI and three national grants from International Research in Priority Areas (IRPA) and Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM).

DSAP ensures quality of research; therefore, students at DSAP have to present a minimum of three presentations to all DSAP staff and students before being allowed to submit their thesis for examination. Students have to present their proposal, the preliminary findings and must deliver a final presentation at the end of their

research. Students at DSAP are trained to strengthen their knowledge and skills in many areas other than the topic of their thesis research. Academic staff at DSAP also offers students free courses and workshops in Biostatistics, Research Design and Methods, Critical Appraisal and Presentation Skills which prepare them to produce quality work and to continue to present their research upon graduation.

Over the years, SAP has proven to be a very essential area of pharmacy research, especially in developing countries. Therefore, being the first and only SAP discipline in Malaysia, USM is a place of interest to all health care professionals who are engaged in social and administrative pharmacy research.