

Position Statement and Joint Resolution on the Doctor of Pharmacy (PharmD) for the First  
Professional Degree at Universities in Canada  
February 2010

### Background Context

The formal training for the practice of pharmacy in Canada has evolved over the past 75 years from trade and apprenticeship courses to 4-year science oriented university programs to the current 5-year (typically a 1+4 model) professional degree program. The changes that have occurred to the formal curriculum and training in pharmacy have been made to ensure that graduates can competently perform contemporary pharmacist practice skills in a modern and changing health care system.

The significant commitment the profession has made in recent years to a more patient-focused role for pharmacists that is more responsive to the pressures on the Canadian health care system will necessitate further changes to the curriculum and structure of professional degree program in pharmacy.

Specifically, professional leaders and consensus reports have called for changes in the education of pharmacy students to include: more interprofessional experiences; greater attention to the AFPC general attributes and outcomes; more “leadership” and management training; more readiness to handle the clinical use of complex biotechnology-derived drugs; added skills in the documentation of care (especially in electronic health records); prescribing skills and the monitoring of drug therapy outcomes; greater proficiency in drug therapy management of chronic diseases; new skills in the technique of vaccine immunization; and several other curricular enhancements.

The professional program in pharmacy has had numerous enhancements over the past 20 years, most notably with the introduction of limited practice experiences and latterly with the focus on pharmaceutical care skill training. However, the explosive growth in the development and use of pharmaceuticals in recent years, particularly drugs with narrow safety and therapeutic profiles, has raised the public health protection responsibility role for pharmacists to a level that was never contemplated when the current academic program for pharmacy was originally conceived. The limited clinical experiences available to students to refine skills required for the monitoring and management of pharmacotherapy of patients under current program structures are insufficient to ensure all students can be proficient and practice-ready at the time of completion of the degree program.

The current baccalaureate professional program at Canadian pharmacy schools can no longer effectively accommodate the proposed added depth and breadth to curricular content knowledge in the pharmaceutical sciences nor provide graduates with the enhanced skills that the profession and the health care system will expect from pharmacists going forward. Canadian pharmacy

schools must consider major programmatic changes to the professional degree curriculum to ensure that future pharmacists will have these enhanced practice competencies and skills.

The required changes to the professional program in pharmacy should result in a reclassification of the pharmacy program to a degree title beyond the credit hours standard applied for a baccalaureate degree. The design of this expanded professional program for pharmacy may be viewed under university policies as appropriate for the award of the doctor of pharmacy (PharmD) degree to students.

### Recent Developments

*Moving Forward: Pharmacy Human Resources for the Future*, the 2008 final report from the federally-funded study of pharmacy human resources in Canada states:

The emergence of the PharmD degree as the first professional degree is one example of universities responding to recognized needs at the entry-to-practice level (in this case, increased experiential learning in a clinical setting). Universities should continue modifying their curricula over time to ensure that students develop the skills and knowledge they will need to practice at the level required by the health system. Such curricular change must reflect ongoing evolution in the delivery of health care and in entry-level practice requirements.

In its section theme on Educating and Training the Pharmacy Workforce, *Moving Forward* includes the following recommendations:

14. Review the knowledge base, abilities, values, interprofessional skills and clinical experience that will be required of pharmacists to practice in expanded and innovative roles, and develop university pharmacy curricula to ensure that future graduates will be competent to practice in these emerging roles.
15. Ensure that pharmacy graduates of Canadian universities receive a credential that appropriately reflects the expected greater academic rigor of restructured curricula for the first professional degree in pharmacy.

A broad cross-section of pharmacy organizations in Canada representing the key professional, advocacy, regulatory, corporate and academic constituencies of the profession published the *Blueprint for Pharmacy: The Vision for Pharmacy in 2008*. The *Blueprint* recognized the importance of changes within education and continuing professional development. It stated that future education of pharmacists needs to emphasize foundational skills (such as communications, clinical decision-making, physical assessment, informatics, confidence building and research) and incorporate management, leadership, advocacy and change management skills. Two of the specific key actions described in the *Blueprint for Pharmacy Implementation Plan* are:

- Ensure that core pharmacy curricula address the knowledge, skills and values required for future pharmacy practice to ensure new graduates are prepared to develop and practice in emerging roles.
- Increase the accessibility, quality, quantity and variety of experiential learning opportunities to prepare pharmacy professionals, including students, to practice in expanded and innovative roles.

### Joint Resolution

*Whereas* the *Moving Forward* final report and the *Blueprint for Pharmacy* both call for pharmacy schools in Canada to ensure that pharmacy curricula address the knowledge, skills and values required for future pharmacy practice so new graduates are prepared to develop and practice in emerging roles, and;

*Whereas* regulatory changes are being introduced by the ministries of health in many provinces in Canada to expand the scope of practice of pharmacists to include responsibility for prescribing medications, adapting prescriptions, performing medication reviews, and administering medications, and;

*Whereas* the Canadian Pharmacists Association has released (March 2009) a position statement stating that it “supports” Canada’s faculties of pharmacy in the transition of their professional pharmacy degree program from a bachelor of science in pharmacy degree to a doctor of pharmacy degree” and;

*Whereas* the current structure of the programs in place at most pharmacy schools in Canada can no longer effectively accommodate the proposed added depth and breadth to curricular content knowledge in the pharmaceutical sciences nor provide graduates with the enhanced skills that the profession and the health care system will expect from pharmacists;

*Be it resolved that*, the Association of Faculties of Pharmacy of Canada and the Association of Deans of Pharmacy of Canada commit to replacing current baccalaureate pharmacy curricula with a comprehensive doctor of pharmacy curricula of foundation knowledge in the biomedical and pharmaceutical sciences, practice skills training and extensive clinical experiences for the first professional degree in pharmacy to ensure that graduates can enter practice to competently perform the enhanced patient care skills that will be expected of pharmacists.

*And further, be it resolved that* the timeline for the transition from the baccalaureate to the doctor of pharmacy curriculum by pharmacy schools in Canada be determined by the Canadian Council for Accreditation of Pharmacy Programs in consultation with its member organizations and schools of pharmacy in Canada. These parties should make significant effort to ensure that all pharmacy schools have a doctor of pharmacy curriculum in place by 2020.