LETTERS

Incorporating an Immunization Course in the Pharmacy Curriculum: Malaysian Experience

To the Editor. The immunization system is a successful systematic program, especially during the last century. However, the immunization system is still imperfect because many countries still have unvaccinated children. The most common reasons for parents not having their child vaccinated are concern about immunization adverse effects, disbelief that the vaccine works, lack of awareness that the immunization is necessary, and lack of healthcare provider recommendation for the immunization.1

Health-care providers play an important role in child immunization because they have positive effects on parental decisions related to immunization.2 As a health care provider, pharmacists have played a role in promoting, maintaining, and improving immunization rates among children because the pharmacist is one of the most accessible healthcare professionals. A pharmacist can be trained to screen children for immunizations and counsel parents on immunization decisions, including providing information on immunizations risks and immunization benefits. In addition, pharmacists are highly regarded by the parents and by most immunization providers as drug information specialists, and often sought by people for medical advice.1,3

In the United States, 49 states have granted authority to pharmacists to immunize people, and pharmacists can play an important role in disease prevention by advocating and administering immunizations.4-6 While pharmacists in Malaysia are not authorized to immunize people, they can promote immunization through several types of activities: history and screening, patient counseling, documentation, administrative measures, and public education and reminders.

In Malaysia, there are about 17 pharmacy colleges and schools (public and private) and 10 schools are fully accredited.7 Most of the schools or colleges do not have enough education courses regarding immunization. These deficiencies in immunization education and training in colleges and schools of pharmacy may contribute to low immunization rates in the Malaysia.

An immunization course was introduced in Kulliyyah of Pharmacy- International Islamic University Malaysia during the current academic year (2012-2013). The course was offered as a part of the Pharmacotherapeutics I module during the first semester for fourth-year students enrolled in the bachelor of pharmacy degree program.

The immunization course consists of 3 hours presented in 3 lectures. The first lecture consists of: immunization and vaccine types in children and adults; schedule and timing; adverse reactions; and contraindications. The topics for the second lecture hour consist of: epidemiology and disease prevention, pharmacist’s role, documentation, record keeping, planning, storage, parents’ education, and reminder. Immunization errors types, pharmacovigilance, and recommendations are presented in the last lecture. At the end of the immunization course, questionnaires will be administered to students to assess their perceptions of the course.

As academic pharmacists, we believe that it is time for Malaysian pharmacy schools to help reach the national goals for immunization compliance through educating future generations of pharmacists. Schools of pharmacy have the responsibility to improve immunization education and to develop the practice skills of undergraduate pharmacy students. It can be done by introducing immunization into the undergraduate pharmacy curriculum. Although the initiation of the new course in pharmacy school requires additional resources and takes time to develop and update the curriculum, we strongly advise others Malaysian schools of pharmacy to mandate immunization education course and training as part of their core curriculum.

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