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RESEARCH ARTICLE

An exploratory study of pharmacists' views on the development of a professional recognition system in Indonesia

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Abstract

Background: A professional recognition system is defined as a quality assured process that recognises an individual's achievement of the completion of knowledge and skills in a particular area or stage of practice. There is an increased interest in professional recognition system development worldwide. **Objective:** This study aims to explore perceptions from practising pharmacists regarding their interests, perceived benefits and methods of the professional recognition system. **Methods:** Forty-three pharmacists participated in interviews or group discussions. The topic guide includes questions on: (1) Pharmacists' interest; (2) The perceived benefits; and (3) The method of implementing the professional recognition system. The transcriptions were analysed thematically. **Results:** Participants showed an interest in developing a professional recognition system in Indonesia. A system where pharmacists could be recognised socially and financially would motivate them to advance in their practice. This system would increase the recognition of pharmacists to other health professionals and society. A combination of several methods was recommended in order to support a credible and transparent system, for example, through a combination of peer review and portfolio. **Conclusion:** In general, the professional recognition system was perceived to be beneficial for pharmacists, other stakeholders, society and the profession. A national transparent, credible and flexible method that is adaptable to the workplace is recommended.

Introduction

The evolving role of pharmacists to meet population needs urges pharmacists to be advanced in their practice in order to provide high-quality pharmaceutical care. A global survey conducted by the International Pharmaceutical Federation (FIP) found that the professional development and recognition of advanced and/or specialised pharmacists are developing worldwide (FIP, 2015; Bader, Bates, & Galbraith, 2020a; Bates, Bader, & Galbraith, 2020b). A professional recognition system is defined as a quality assured process that recognises an individual's achievement of the completion of knowledge and skills

in a particular area or stage of practice. This process evaluates and documents evidence of professional or educational capabilities and qualifications. The process may include both formal and informal qualifications and capabilities: university degree, diploma, and certification; quality-assured evidence of capability; professional examinations; membership criteria for learned societies or associations (Joint Partners Credentialing Task Group, 2013; Rouse, Vlasses, Webb, & Pharmacy, 2014). Benefits of the professional recognition system to patients, practitioners and employers have been highlighted in the literature (Joint Partners Credentialing Task Group, 2013; Mitchell,

Cardiff, Bettenay, & Lum, 2013; Rouse *et al.*, 2014; Imison, Castle-Clarke, & Watson, 2016).

In Indonesia, the professional leadership body for pharmacists, the Indonesian Pharmacists Association (IAI), set out five pillars of action to advance the pharmacy profession. One of the pillars is to enhance pharmacy recognition and acceptance and increase pharmacists' branding (Hermansyah *et al.*, 2020). The professional recognition system could be developed to support this pillar. There is scarce evidence on pharmacists' perception of the professional recognition system development. This study was conducted to explore perceptions from practising pharmacists regarding their interests, perceived benefits and methods of the professional recognition system.

Method

This study was a qualitative study with multiple data collection methods, namely face-to-face group discussions and online and in-person semi-structured interviews. Participants were recruited using a combination of convenience sampling and snowball sampling strategies. They were invited during the 2017 congress of the Indonesian Pharmacists Association (IAI). The probing questions in the topic guide include (1) Pharmacists' interest and needs regarding the professional recognition system; (2) Perceived benefits of the professional recognition system; and (3) Methods for implementing the professional recognition system. The interviews and group discussions were recorded and transcribed in the Indonesian language (Bahasa). The data analysis process was conducted thematically using a qualitative data analysis software –NVivo Version 12.

An ethics approval was granted by the University College London (UCL) Research Ethics Committee (Application 11819/002). Each participant signed was given a participant information sheet, and they signed a consent form. Their responses were kept confidential, and the result was presented with no possibility of identifying individuals.

Results

Forty-three pharmacists participated in the groups' discussions (two to five people) and one-to-one interviews (see Table I). There was a variation of practising pharmacists across the sector, years of experience and geographical area of Indonesia. Overall, the participants expressed a general interest in the professional recognition system. They shared their

perceived benefits of the system if it is being implemented and described their views on what the assessment methods should look like.

Table I: Demographics of participants (n = 43)

Variable	Number (%)
Gender	
Male	13 (30)
Female	30 (70)
Area of practice	
Academic	5 (12)
Community	11 (26)
Government institution	3 (7)
Hospital	15 (35)
Industry	6 (14)
Primary health care	3 (7)
Years of experience	
< 3 years	15 (35)
3 - 5 years	15 (35)
6 -10 years	7 (16)
> 10 years	6 (14)
Geographical area	
Central part	34 (79)
West part	7 (16)
East part	2 (5)
Data collection methods	
Group interviewing (25 people)	Six group discussions = 21 participants (49)
One-to-one interview	22 (51)

Interests in the professional recognition system

The interests are described in four main views: themselves, pharmacist/profession, other healthcare professionals, and the professional leadership body. They perceived that they would be able to get recognition from others with the system, increasing their selling value. Not surprisingly, this was mentioned mainly by the community and hospital pharmacists.

"...the recognition is an indication that we have reached an advanced stage based on our experience or knowledge, [so] we can get recognition from other health workers such as doctors." (Participant 28, female, private hospital, 4 years' experience, central part)."

Participants across years of experience expressed that the system is beneficial for pharmacists and the profession. The recognition system would support pharmacy as a profession to be socially recognised as proof of performance for the public. It could be a way to be financially recognised. This was mostly mentioned by pharmacists who have practised for three to five years.

Some participants perceived that there might be a mixed interest in pharmacist recognition from other stakeholders. This was mentioned by pharmacists working in academic institutions, community, and industrial settings. The stakeholders who supported the system might feel that with recognition, they would be able to find a suitable partner with whom to discuss patient management. For example, they would be in touch with recognised advanced practitioners for patients with complex co-morbidities and medicines. This situation would build their trust for them to interact more with advanced practitioners.

"Usually, there are two situations. For example, on the medical doctor side, some of them may say this system will support them to work together to improve the patient's condition. However, there might be some who would think that recognised advanced pharmacists can be their competitor in providing services to patients." (Participant 19, male, educational institution, 2 years' experience, central part).

Some pharmacists highlighted that the recognition programme would help the Indonesian Pharmacists Association (IAI) to further develop the profession in Indonesia. This programme could help the IAI in mapping their members to develop more targeted CPD for them.

"In the context of the IAI, this system can be a basis for them to develop pharmacists in Indonesia. They can do mapping for pharmacists; for example, only 20% of pharmacists are intermediate pharmacists. Therefore, in five years, they can create a programme on how to improve pharmacist competency to push more pharmacists to be at intermediate levels... the training programme they create will be more targeted." (Participant 8, male, public hospital, 5 years' experience, central part).

The participants described the benefits of the system in a personal and social context. A professional recognition system would push pharmacists to improve their competency, which would add value to themselves if they did so. Apart from benefiting themselves, they also mentioned that the impact of advanced practitioners would be felt by society.

Description and methods of the professional recognition system

Some pharmacists, especially those working in community, hospital, and industry settings, emphasised the need for a straightforward approach that is easily accessible by pharmacists across Indonesia. They perceived that the revalidation system,

which already exists, was very complex. They expressed that an online system would deem appropriate, and it was recommended to link the system with the available career pathway and revalidation system in Indonesia. It is interesting to note that some participants working in community and hospital settings suggested a 'not mandatory' system where pharmacists can progress towards career pathways according to their personal plan and journey.

Some participants stated that a combination of methods was needed to define the stage of practice because some methods had limitations, which could be overcome using mixed methods. For instance, an exam was the standard method to assess knowledge; however, it could not assess the performance or the technical skill that pharmacists have. Therefore, a combination of several methods should be considered.

"For example, for community pharmacy, the service is related to the population. There are many skills in being a community pharmacy: counselling, how they start their own business, their marketing skills. So, in my opinion, to assess this skill, we cannot just do an exam.... We need to look at this holistically. If it's a test, yes, we can pass it, but we need to assess the service that we provide." (Participant 26, male, community setting, 4 years' experience, central part).

Pharmacists from various sectors of practice and levels of experience stated that attending structured continuing education is the normal method to improve knowledge. This method could standardise learning; however, some participants mentioned that there was a challenge related to the time and cost to attend formal education. This was mentioned by female participants who reflected their workplace situation, considering the limited time that they have to attend structured education due to family responsibilities.

Another method stated by some pharmacists was a portfolio containing competency evidence; this was mostly expressed by pharmacists working in the patient care setting and having less than five years' experience. This method was perceived to be a feasible and cost-effective way of developing pharmacists across the area of practice in Indonesia. A peer assessment method was also suggested by pharmacists from various sectors of practice. Some pharmacists stated that when the peer process was credible, this would be a robust method to define stages of practice.

"A combination of training and portfolio will assess and improve practitioners' knowledge and experience. So, in terms of knowledge aspect, they can get it from the training. Then, for the portfolios, it will show the experience that they

have [gained]. There is also validation from superiors in the portfolio, meaning that it has also been validated so that it will represent the capabilities of the pharmacist." (Participant 28, female, private hospital, 4 years' experience, central part).

Collaboration between the professional body, regulator, employer, and educational institutions was regarded as necessary to produce a good system.

Discussion and conclusion

This paper provided evidence of the interest of practising pharmacists in Indonesia on the professional recognition system development to recognise their practice advancement. A professional recognition system by which pharmacists can be socially recognised and financially remunerated would motivate pharmacists to be more advanced in their practice. This would also build trust from other health workers in pharmacists. Nationally, the professional recognition system would support the development of the pharmacy profession and support the IAI's pillar of action to advance the profession. It was perceived that the system would be beneficial for pharmacists' branding and their impact on society. This finding is consistent with the principles of professional recognition systems in other countries (Joint Partners Credentialing Task Group, 2013; Rouse *et al.*, 2014; Gellatly & Galbraith, 2020). The professional recognition system aims to provide credible evidence of the pharmacist's role in medicines expertise, patient safety and in enhancing the quality and impact of pharmaceutical care provision (Joint Partners Credentialing Task Group, 2013).

Developing a system that is simple, preferably online, and linked with the career pathway in the workplace was recommended. There were mixed perceptions about the methods to be used for the professional recognition system; however, a combination of several methods was recommended in defining advanced practice within the professional recognition system. Having an online portfolio could be one of the methods used for a professional recognition system in Indonesia. This method would allow all Indonesian pharmacists to have developmental and self-directed learning by themselves to advance their practice.

The portfolio is also used in other countries and is the most common way to demonstrate pharmacists' performance at an advanced level (Udoh *et al.*, 2018; FIP, 2020b). It allows a pharmacist to choose their pathway to build their level of competence; this supports a flexible system for Indonesian pharmacists,

of whom the majority are females (Pengurus Pusat Ikatan Apoteker Indonesia, 2020). It also enables the pharmacist's competency to be demonstrated through a self-assessment and evaluated by other colleagues. This system will provide an opportunity to offer peer support. It will also support prospects for mentoring and supportive feedback from peers to improve their practice.

The authors acknowledged that the findings might not be generalisable to the whole population of Indonesian pharmacists considering the small sample size and the nature of the sampling strategy. However, as an exploratory study, the findings provided some recommendations on what the system should look like, which could be used by the professional leadership body to develop the system according to pharmacists' needs in Indonesia. Future research on the implementation and evaluation of the system could be carried out.

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