

The History and Future of Pharmacy (World Pharmacists Day - September 25, 2024)

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Introduction

The history of pharmacy, **one of the oldest professions**, is a rich tapestry of science, art, and human care, deeply intertwined with advancing medicine and public health. From its origins in ancient civilisations to its present role in global healthcare, pharmacy has continuously evolved to meet the changing needs of society. Today, as we celebrate World Pharmacists Day on September 25, 2024, it is an opportune moment to reflect on the journey of pharmacy from the time of Imhotep, the first known pharmacist, and look ahead to the bright future of the profession in a rapidly advancing world.

Ancient Beginnings: Imhotep and the Foundations of Pharmacy

The history of pharmacy can be traced back to an African, Imhotep, who lived around 2650 BCE in ancient Egypt. Imhotep was a polymath—pharmacist, physician, architect, and vizier to Pharaoh Djoser—and is considered one of the first recorded figures to link medicine with healing practices. As a key figure in ancient Egyptian medicine, Imhotep was responsible for developing remedies using over 200 extracts of plants' natural substances to treat ailments. His name is often associated with early pharmacy because he was among the first to practice the art of compounding, blending herbs and other materials into medications that would promote healing. Imhotep lived about 2,200 years before Hippocrates, the

celebrated father of medicine who lived from 460 BCE to circa 370 BCE.

The Ebers Papyrus, an ancient Egyptian medical text dating to around 1500 BCE, is one of the oldest known pharmacopoeias. It contains hundreds of medicinal recipes that early pharmacists used to treat various ailments, ranging from digestive disorders to wounds and infections. Pharmacy in ancient Egypt laid the groundwork for future pharmacological practices by highlighting the importance of herbal remedies, chemical substances, and compounding.

Ancient Greece and Rome: The Emergence of Specialized Pharmacists

Pharmacy advanced significantly in ancient Greece and Rome, where scholars such as Hippocrates and Galen laid the foundations for the practice of medicine and pharmacy. Hippocrates, often regarded as the father of modern medicine, emphasised the importance of natural healing and advocated using diet, exercise, and natural remedies in treatment. His belief that health and disease were influenced by the balance of bodily fluids—humours—shaped the understanding of medicine and pharmacy for centuries.

Galen, a Greek physician and philosopher, contributed extensively to the pharmacy field by developing Galenic formulations, a series of medicinal compounds that would

influence pharmaceutical compounding for centuries. Galen's approach to pharmacy emphasised the combination of different substances to create balanced, effective remedies, a practice still at the heart of modern pharmaceutical compounding.

The Golden Age: Pharmacy as a Separate Profession

During the Golden Age (8th to 13th centuries), the profession of pharmacy became distinct from medicine. In cities such as Baghdad, pharmacies (saydalas) were established, and pharmacists (saydalani) became respected professionals in their own right. Pioneering scholars such as Avicenna and Al-Razi expanded upon earlier works, refining the art of compounding and developing new medicinal treatments.

Pharmacists during this period were responsible for preparing, compounding, and dispensing medications, and they worked closely with physicians to ensure the correct use of therapeutic substances. Al-Zahrawi, another prominent figure, authored works on the preparation of medicines, which served as important references in Europe for centuries.

The Renaissance and the Apothecaries: Pharmacy Takes Root in Europe

In medieval Europe, pharmacy established itself as a formal profession by developing apothecaries. Apothecaries were the forerunners of modern pharmacists, responsible for preparing and selling medicines. The Guild of Apothecaries, established in the 13th century, helped formalise the training and regulation of pharmacists, setting standards for the profession.

One of the most significant figures in this era was Paracelsus, a Swiss physician and alchemist who revolutionised medicine by introducing the idea that diseases could be treated with specific chemical substances. Paracelsus' work laid the foundation for pharmaceutical chemistry, which would eventually evolve into the modern pharmaceutical industry.

The Industrial Revolution: The Birth of Modern Pharmacy

The 19th century saw the emergence of modern pharmacy with the advent of pharmaceutical chemistry and the mass production of medicines. The discovery of essential drugs such as morphine, quinine, and aspirin transformed pharmacy from a practice of compounding individual

remedies to one of producing standardised pharmaceutical products.

Pharmacists began working alongside physicians and researchers to develop new medicines, and the pharmaceutical industry increased with the rise of large pharmaceutical companies. The first pharmacopoeias, including the United States Pharmacopeia (USP), were published, providing standardised guidelines for preparing and dispensing medications.

The 20th and 21st Centuries: Pharmacists as Integral Healthcare Providers

The role of pharmacists continued to evolve throughout the 20th and 21st centuries as advances in science and medicine transformed healthcare. The discovery of antibiotics, vaccines, and synthetic drugs revolutionised treatment options, and pharmacists became increasingly involved in patient care and medication management.

Pharmacy education expanded to include specialised training in pharmacotherapeutics, clinical pharmacy, and public health, allowing pharmacists to take on new responsibilities in managing chronic diseases, providing immunisations, and ensuring the safe use of medications. The role of pharmacists in medication therapy management (MTM) became crucial as they worked to optimise medication use and improve patient outcomes, especially for individuals with complex medication regimens.

The Future of Pharmacy: A Vision for Global Health

As we celebrate World Pharmacists Day 2024, we look toward the future of pharmacy in a rapidly changing world. The role of pharmacists will continue to expand as they take on greater responsibilities in patient care, public health, and global healthcare challenges.

The rise of personalised medicine and precision pharmacotherapy will allow pharmacists to tailor treatments to individual patients based on genetic information, improving the effectiveness and safety of therapies. The integration of digital health technologies, including the use of artificial intelligence and dispensing ATMs, will further enhance the role of pharmacists, enabling them to monitor patient adherence remotely, manage chronic diseases, and provide real-time consultations through telepharmacy.

Pharmacists will also be critical in addressing global health

challenges, such as antimicrobial resistance, emerging infectious diseases, and healthcare access in underserved regions. As healthcare systems worldwide strive to meet the demands of ageing populations and increasing chronic diseases, pharmacists will be at the forefront of ensuring patients receive the proper medications at the right time.

Conclusion

From the time of Imhotep, who laid the foundation for pharmacy practice in ancient Egypt, to the present day, pharmacists have been central to the advancement of healthcare. As we celebrate World Pharmacists Day 2024, we honour the profession's rich history and recognise pharmacists' critical role in improving health outcomes across the globe.

Looking forward, the future of pharmacy is bright, with pharmacists positioned to continue making significant

contributions to global health. Whether through innovative therapies, expanding clinical services, or integrating new technologies, pharmacists will remain critical to meeting the evolving healthcare needs of populations worldwide.

As we reflect on the past and embrace the future, we are reminded that the core of pharmacy remains the same—caring for patients, advancing medicine, and improving lives.

We need to be incredibly proud of who we are as Pharmacists. Still, it is also time to act on the vast knowledge we have acquired to transform Pharmacy to make more IMPACT – Individuals Making Positive Accelerated Change for Transformations.