



Australian Pharmacy Network: Learning Outcomes for Pharmacy Curriculum

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University of New England

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<http://pharmacylearning.edu.au/>

Network summary

Network funds were used to support ongoing collaborative work in the discipline to address learning standards and the embedding of these in future academic practices, thus enhancing academic capacity across pharmacy schools.

The collaborative work was focused on the development and articulation of Learning Outcomes for pharmacy. These learning outcomes have started to inform the planning of learning and teaching materials in pharmacy curricula. The potential of using learning outcomes and aligned assessment tasks for benchmarking has been recognised across the pharmacy academic community.

The newly developed learning outcomes have undergone several iterations of distribution, and the seeking of feedback to and from Australian and New Zealand pharmacy academics over the two year period of the network funding. Feedback has also been sought from pharmacy students at their annual national congresses.

The newly revised pharmacy program accreditation standards reference the learning outcomes as developed in the network; however the discussions and planning of how these will inform accreditation standards will be the subject of future work.

The pharmacy learning outcomes document encompassing eight different outcomes has been expanded with the development of exemplar standards. The pharmacy learning outcomes have also been mapped against the Health, Medicine and Veterinary Science Threshold Learning Outcomes (ALTC project) and pharmacy specific outcomes identified. Although not a focus of the network, interprofessional learning may be facilitated through consideration of the 'nonspecific outcomes' across allied health, medical and nursing programs.

A key achievement of the project is the development of an independently hosted website <http://pharmacylearning.edu.au/>, which hosts the materials around the development of the learning outcomes and a section, which will allow academic staff to continue the collaborative process of developing assessment tasks and benchmarking their own university's assessment tasks.

Contribution to learning and teaching

The work of the network has been very collaborative with several rounds of seeking input into the learning outcomes and exemplar standards.

The work to collaboratively develop learning outcomes and exemplar standards has focused attention on outcomes rather than inputs in pharmacy education. This is aligned with the

Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) requirements and the new accreditation standards for pharmacy programs in Australia and New Zealand, which are now also focused on outcomes. This is a major contribution to quality learning and teaching within the pharmacy discipline as it will be the touchstone for development of curriculum and assessment strategies. Furthermore, the closer articulation with accreditation standards will assist graduates in their transition to the internship year.

The process of bringing together representatives from each pharmacy school (all schools were invited to participate, participants from 17 Australian schools attended) to attend fully funded workshops to firstly describe graduate outcomes, and secondly develop exemplar standards for these outcomes has enabled the use of a 'champion' model of working across the discipline. The champions have discussed issues, questions, etc., at their own universities and then provided feedback to the project team. This has also supported informal dissemination of the outcomes and standards.

The process of commencing to collaboratively work on examples of assessments which could be used to evidence achievement of outcomes has led to informal comparisons of expectations of standards of student work.

The work of the network has provided a focus for student involvement in the national pharmacy program initiatives. Indeed students have participated in workshops and have been consulted on their views.

Lastly the Australasian Pharmaceutical Sciences Association (APSA) has had a focus on learning outcomes at its 2011-12 conference education workshops (the network has organised these workshops). Prior to this, topics at the education forum have been somewhat disparate and have not systematically addressed pharmacy education priorities.

Factors contributing to productive networking

The network has worked very productively across the pharmacy academic community in Australia and New Zealand. We have facilitated two 2-day workshops, utilised the education fora at the APSA, presented at conference education sessions on our progress, networked with organisations focusing on science learning outcomes, engaged with students and engaged with our accreditation and other professional bodies. It is noteworthy that the work of the network is referenced in the newly approved accreditation requirements for pharmacy programs in Australia and New Zealand.

The processes, which have worked well, have been the bringing together of representatives from all universities and then asking these representatives to disseminate and discuss issues at their own universities and forward feedback back to the project team. The learning outcomes and exemplar standards have undergone multiple iterations, ensuring academic ownership of

both outcomes and standards. The university representatives and champions have been instrumental in raising the profile of learning outcomes at each school. Informal feedback indicates that a number of pharmacy schools are commencing the process of mapping to learning outcomes.

Our project team includes senior academic staff including heads of programs. This has also ensured that the work of the network has been highly visible across the pharmacy academic community. The network project team also included academics who had led previous learning projects which were very focused on providing resources and approaches, which were freely available to the academic community. Continuity and a continuity of trust have thus been ensured. The network has also engaged with the student community.

The processes described above can be applied in all networking around learning and teaching irrespective of discipline.

Barriers to productive networking

The network has worked extremely well and encountered few barriers. The major challenge for the network is the extremely busy nature of Australian academic life. Therefore, strategies such as reminders etc., have needed to be used in order to ensure attendance at workshops so on. It has been important to acknowledge that meetings and workshops represent a significant investment of time on behalf of participants. To manage this all activities needed to be well planned, with appropriate provision of materials prior to activities, focused facilitation and reasonably prompt follow up.

The network has been focused around a very key requirement for pharmacy programs and outcomes and the acknowledged link to demonstration of outcomes. This focus sits very well with all pharmacy academics — those who focus on discipline research and also those who are focused on learning and teaching.

What the network offers

Pharmacy programs have a number of stakeholders — students, academics, preceptors, the profession, the pharmacy program accreditation body and the general population. The network has offered an authentic opportunity for all stakeholders to be engaged in the development and application of learning outcomes and standards.

The network has developed learning outcomes for pharmacy programs. Given that prior to this, no clear endpoint was specified, merely that the graduate be able to commence an internship, this project outcome is highly significant. Learning outcomes will ensure that all students will have achieved a minimum threshold prior to entry into the internship. Students when surveyed have indicated overwhelming support for the concept of the identical core learning outcomes

across all programs, and indeed have overwhelmingly supported the proposed “level” as indicated by exemplar standards. Once learning outcomes are promulgated, internship preceptors will in turn have similar minimum expectations. The pharmacy academic community has collaboratively developed a set of learning outcomes for pharmacy programs. The challenge will be to ensure that a process to demonstrate that programs are able to ensure that students achieve these learning outcomes is similarly developed.

For pharmacy academics, the network has provided a unique opportunity to work together. Participant evaluation of the 2012 workshop suggested that it was “(a) great meeting, excellent outcomes” with 83 per cent of participants strongly agreeing with the statement that “participant’s contributions were sought and valued”. The process has also provided for some preliminary benchmarking across schools. A collaborative exercise of a simple meta-analysis of assessments brought to the 2013 workshop by a number of participants, indicated that for a pass grade student there were expectations for information gathering/evaluating, making a decision/judgement/suitable choice, while justifying it and explaining it based on competing principles/information and various possible options. Capturing and distributing to the network this type of collaborative work provides academics with reference points to their own work at their own institutions.

The following comments were made by two of the participants at the 2013 workshop

“there is great utility in meeting with colleague in comparable work settings as well all face common challenges like time and workload, a sense of professional responsibility to the public and the profession “

“working with other colleagues seemed to generate a synergy”