

# Methods for Improving Communication Skills of Rural Students in Pharmaceutical Education

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**Abstract:** India is one of the developing countries having a lot of rural students but they are not properly utilized. Many of the students from urban areas having enough qualification are getting good job opportunities. But the category which is the rural students is just having the dream of getting an employment. Employers prefer to hire and promote those persons who are resourceful, ethical and self directed with good communication skills. Hard skills and experience are not at all enough for the competitive and escalation in the global world. The rural students also should get employment otherwise it will become very serious and critical. Rural students who are studying Pharmaceutical Education should be given opportunities to learn and practice interpersonal communication skills during their educational curriculum. In this paper the role communication skill for the rural student in order to get better employment has been discussed and presented in the technical format. The communication skill Faculty has the responsibility of setting the stage for the pharmacy students to get good communication skill when they are studying in the college itself. Once theory lectures is completed, faculty can develop strategies for incorporating the students into the practice's patient care activities. Students should participate in model patient counselling, interviewing, and educational sessions. Also, students should participate in collaborative work with other health care providers. To ensure the development of communication skills in pharmacy students, all the faculty who are teaching technical papers also incorporate the communication skill process into their teaching activities. By following these strategies, an institute can effectively and positively impact the communication skills of their rural students thereby they can get good job opportunities in the global world.

**Keywords:** pharmacy, rural students, communication skills, faculty, patients

## I. Introduction

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the survival is very competitive due to the development of technology. Technical skills can be learnt, applied and measured to an established degree. But the same cannot be said of communication skills. Whether it involves face to face customer interaction or even indirect correspondence over telephone or Email, employees adapt at communication skills will achieve both individual as well as organizational success. This requirement of communication skills in a job has made the competition for getting the job and sustaining in job is very tough. All the students who wish to get a best job over their competitor are expected to increase their communication skills.

So today's professionals need a high communication skills quotient, apart from the domain knowledge in order to succeed in this competitive era. For inculcating communication skills in them, the institutes have to provide communication skill trainings as a part of their curriculum.

This will improve their complete personality and compatibility therefore enabling them to secure a respectable position in the corporate world. Usually the rural students are far more lagging in the communication skills due to the society where they grown up. So the institutes should take necessary steps to incorporate the communication skills not only in the curriculum but also conducting workshops at periodical time and setting up mock interviews.

Hard technical skills contribute to only 15% of one's success while remaining 85% is made by communication skills as per the survey. In spite of such great relevance of communication skills in the present

corporate world some of the institutions are yet to introduce communication skills in their curriculum. Interpersonal communication skills are important for pharmacists to master. Whether counselling patients or communicating with physicians, or interacting with associates, pharmacists use their interpersonal communication skills daily.

Effective communication by pharmacists is essential to improve the use of medications by patients and ensure optimal sales outcomes. Pharmacists can improve patient adherence to drug therapy through appropriate strategies, including patient counselling and education. In addition to verbal communication, appropriately written recommendations to physicians to resolve drug therapy problems can be an effective strategy for drug therapy changes.

Because of the importance of interpersonal communication skills in practice, pharmacy students need appropriate training to develop their own effective communication styles. Faculty have the responsibility to create the environment for clerkship students to practice their communication skills, provide timely and constructive feedback, and demonstrate the significance of a variety of communication opportunities.

Faculty need a well thought out plan to incorporate training into the workflow and to provide efficient and effective teaching opportunities for students. The students should be also well versed in all the communication Medias like utilizing the mobile phones, emails etc. This paper reviews the role of the communication skill faculty in facilitating development of communication skills for the rural students participating in pharmacy education and provides strategies for incorporating communication and collaboration in patient care activities.

## II Setting the Stage for Communication

During the first lecture session, faculty can make the groups randomly but ensuring that the group should have both rural and urban students and also having both sexes. The efficiency of the group will increase while having both sexes. Then the faculty should explain the task what they are going to perform as a group.

The task will be like counselling of patients management of prescriptions, service, and patient care. Every group should get an opportunity to communicate the mission and goals of the group. The entire student should deliver some talks regarding the task during Practices. Setting this kind of stage for the students with these terminologies will prevent communication problems before they occur. During the practical session, the faculty should introduce the pharmacist to students and the pharmacists should describe their role in the pharmacy and what are the types of communication needed to increase their work performance.

Students can benefit from spending time with pharmacist, learning the role of communication in each position. Some pharmacies have job descriptions and specific duties assigned to different technicians and clerks. This helps to keep an efficient workflow, maximize patient care activities, and minimize medication errors. This type of system frees up the pharmacist to provide counselling and other value added services to patients. This kind of experience of pharmacists should be shared with the students which will help them to see the importance of a technician run dispensing process.

Also some times the guest pharmacists may serve as a role model for the budding young students on how to take phone calls from patients and recorded calls from other health care providers. Since each patient population has special needs, pharmacist faculty will also need to describe the patients and community the pharmacy serves. Along with age, culture, and family size breakdowns, the discussion should also include specific prevalent disease states, conditions, and needs of the patients.

### III Students in Patient Care Activities

Once the students understand the basic work of pharmacists, they can go for model patient care activities, where a student from one group will consider as a patient and other group student is considered as a pharmacist. Faculty must ensure that all the rural students are also participate actively in the group. Even a faculty can arrange in such a way there should be a female pharmacists for male patients and vice versa.

This kind of activity will reduce a shyness of the students and specific products should be taken into consideration and at first the faculty should give the demo presentation so that the student can get an idea related to patient care activities. After the model session finished the faculty should find an average student and send for a real practice with some products like hair oil etc. Both the student and the patient feedback should be collected and demonstrated to the students so that they can rectify the mistakes. Both written and verbal communication skills will be taught for the students to establish positive and productive relationships between the pharmacists and patients.

### IV Pharmacist and Patient Relationship

The students after becoming the Pharmacists have opportunities to interface with patients, in the way of either counselling or interviewing. So the communication skill faculty should provide excellent training for the students especially from rural areas to develop a professional relationship with patients. And also the faculty should explain the need of This relationship and what all the base for excellent relationship like foundation of trust and an open exchange of information and it should be collaborative relationship. Pharmacy students should understand the importance of this relationship and that it builds over time with each patient Practice.

The students should understand that they have to spend time for every patient with love and care to get better relationship with students. This relationship establishes a bonding between pharmacist and patient.

Pharmacists promise to utilize their clinical knowledge and technical skills to provide the best treatment to the patients. And the patients also should provide pharmacists with the information needed to effectively manage their drug therapy and the treatment. This fulfilling the promise is one of the most important effective concepts for students to learn while accepting responsibility for their patient care activities. And the students are encouraged to make more promises at the same time they should fulfil those promises.

### V Patient Counselling

Counselling the patients about their medical prescription is a very important task for the pharmacists and this is the place where rural students are lagging due to the lack of communication skills. Pharmacists are the only health care providers focusing on the patient ensure that they know perfectly about their medical prescription and how much dose they has to take and how much time should take daily and sometimes even the side effects of the medicines should be taught to the patients.

All The pharmacy students should be trained to use any best counselling method to counsel the patients. Counselling method developed by the Indian Health Service (IHS) is one of the best methods available in India for the pharmacy students. Such kind of counselling method will have an effective strategy for counselling the patients because it is using the feedback mechanism and open ended questions to increase the effective communication between the pharmacist and patient. This kind of counselling method should be incorporate in the training time of the students so that they will be familiar in asking open ended questions and how to engaging the patients throughout the counselling period of time and also feedback mechanism will give the opportunities to the students increase the effective counselling ideas before they are going to the real time world.

Even though the above counselling strategy is very effective, still the students should understand that only the just verbal communication skills are not enough. The students should also have a personality development skill set that will increase the patients counselling methodology more meaning full. Some of such personality development skill set are active listening to the patients will feel more charm to patients , eye to eye contact will increase the trust and body language will bring the counselling more easy. The communication skill Pharmacist faculty should review all

the students individually and clearing all the questions arises in the practice about the patient counselling methodology and what are the stuffs the students need to add up to improve the process much more effective in the future.

Real time Patient counselling sessions should be documented either in video format or audio format and the student are instructed to watch the video repeatedly to get familiar with the real time patients counselling sessions. Some Students can be sent along with the pharmacists to assist the patient counselling about the drug therapy and the students provided an opportunities to share the experience with the other students this will decrease the workload of the system and students gets more benefited.

There are times when pharmacists need to go beyond counselling patients during dispensing functions and collect more in depth clinical information. Instead of counselling the patients they should interview the patients. On such kind of time, the pharmacists should be very much systematic and he need to plan all the questions should be asked in the patient interview to ensure that within the stipulated period of time, the pharmacists will get the comprehensive and precision data collection about the seriousness of the disease and their allied problems faced by the patients.

interviewing the patients is the most required skill for the pharmacy students and the students need to develop such a skills in the institute itself and the communication skill faculty should arrange a group discussion setup to increase such kind of skills. Faculty can review these kinds of skills sets are understood by the students, how they are used and demonstrated in the group discussion.

## **VI Pharmacist & Physicians Relationships**

The pharmacy students need to develop a collaborative working relationship with physician which is the key to become the best pharmacists in the industry and the pharmacist required to put more efforts to get such a collaborative relationship with the physicians. A theoretical model need to be developed by both the faculty and the students on discussion with the best physician available in the institute for the development of a physician pharmacist collaborative relationship thereby both the pharmacists and the physician should get mutual benefits and get rid of all the communication problems created by professional relationship.

Then the theoretical model should be tested for the effectiveness by having a mutual discussion with various experienced pharmacists and physicians. The theoretical should contain the basic things like role specification, trustworthiness, and relationship initiation. Pharmacist faculty can schedule meetings with physicians and/or the office staff with some of the students chosen randomly irrespective of gender and knowledge and the students should have a rotation so that all students will get the chances to collaborate with the physician. More than that the students are encouraged to utilize the professional social networks where they can find numerous experienced physician and pharmacists to collaborate with them and this will also help them to find the better job.

This exercise helps to establish to the students that it will often be the pharmacist who initiates the relationship with the physician. It is important to teach the student to learn as much as they can about the physician's practice

during face to face meetings. Role specification was the most influential driver for collaboration. This entails pharmacists and physicians understanding each other's role in the patient care process. This role specification may differ with different providers.

Some of the physicians may not be interested with collaborative practice agreements, yet they will accept students sending in written recommendations. As pharmacist faculty and students meet with physicians, agreeing on what each other's role and function is will be important to maintain collaboration. Physicians need to trust the knowledge and technical skills of students before they are willing to work with them and accept their technical recommendations.

Pharmacy faculty can provide students with opportunities to consult with physicians regarding medication issues affecting patients. This may be done over the phone or it may be done face to face depending upon the clinical situation. Using appropriate communication strategies during physician consultations is important. Pharmacists should teach students to use the right words during a consult a patients. For performing the written or faxed communications to the physicians, students should be trained to use standardized technical forms available online in the internet or on consulting with the faculty they can frame a standardised forms with latest trends. Students should be taught to be preparing short writing of their recommendations and provide enough information to physicians to help them assess the disease condition.

## **VII Communication with Colleagues**

All the pharmacy students will be working with other pharmacists and support staff once they become graduated and moved for the job. Therefore, learning and utilizing the interpersonal communication skills within the workplace with all colleagues is an important thing for the pharmacy student. Good communication in the workplace begins with mutual respect with other co workers and they should have a willingness to become a good team player. To brings such kind of mind set. The institution should set up the rules in such a way. Once the students completed half of their academic sessions they should be treated as pharmacists.

Among the students they should have a corporate relationship so that they can play a very good role when they been in the working scenario. Skills for providing critical feedback to employees can be demonstrated during the student evaluation. Successful practices and clerkships involve ongoing feedback to staff and students, respectively. This feedback from an institute or faculty about the student should be always constructive and educational. It should help the students to identify their strengths and weaknesses and discuss ways they can improve to meet the expectations of the evaluator. This kind of feedback is not easy to give or to receive, but if done appropriately, it can be used to improve performance.

## **VIII Written Communication Skills**

The need of communication skills in writing also needed for the pharmacists to communicate in writing to patients and other healthcare providers in a variety of ways. Written communication skills can be improved by establishing periodical model writing tasks for the student to

figure out the problems faced by them in written communication skills and counteract the same. Exercises that the student could create and complete during the training include:

- (1) Developing patient counselling materials,
- (2) Writing a store inventory.
- (3) Writing an official letter.
- (4) Preparing a technical paper.
- (5) Preparing a patient case presentation.
- (6) Preparing the brochure for marketing.

Documentation is becoming more and more important in all practice settings. Faculty should evaluate the documentation made by the students during their training routinely in their practice. By critically evaluating their documentation system, the faculty can determine the areas they need to document more effectively. The student should determine what needs to be documented following a patient Practice, and after receiving approval from the faculty, enter the documentation. Frequently, the faculty can check the documentation for clarification.

Faculty can have the student prepare the Email and be responsible for following through with the tasks. Students need to get some work like student could write the letter and then modify/revise it according to feedback from the faculty.

The student can review existing charts to become familiar with the pharmacist's documentation system. One strategy that can be used to help students practice documentation is to create a teaching chart. The teaching chart allows faculty to provide written and verbal feedback to the students before they begin to document in an actual patient's chart. Many students are apprehensive about their writing skills. The more opportunities the clerkship students have to write and to receive feedback, the more concise and confident they will become. Writing exercises in the practical sessions provide real world examples to the student and demonstrates the importance of developing professional writing skills.

## IX Conclusion

Communication skill is one of the best tools to increase the job employment for the rural student who are studying in pharmaceutical education colleges. All the above methodologies are carried out and the results shown there is a very good improvement of communication skill of all rural students and as well as their morality also increased. The stated all methodologies cannot be applied in all areas of the world but they can modify the methodologies depending on the suitability of the environment. Communication in various forms is becoming more important in the evolving world of pharmacy. Due to communication skill set up the outcome can positively impact the pharmacy site, faculty, student, and more importantly, the patient.

Effective communication and interpersonal skills are crucial to increase employment opportunities and to compete successfully in the business environment. The real key to the effectiveness of professionals is their ability to put their domain knowledge into effective practice. To conclude this, the communication skills program is about enabling and empowerment. With these kind of communication skill training programs the students will have a smooth transition from aspiring students to young successful pharmacists. The paper also puts forward some suggestions for making

above initiatives more effective for developing the rural students fully equipped with relevant communication skills.

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