



M. Chandra Sekar, R.Ph., Ph.D
College of Pharmacy, University of Findlay
Email – sekar@findlay.edu

TWO MODELS FOR INTERNATIONAL PHARMACY EXCHANGE

In this article, I would like to present information on two models for exchange of pharmaceutical professionals that I am aware of with the common goal of improving pharmaceutical care around the world.

First, the more established one with the longer track record is - Pharmbridge. Pharmbridge is a voluntary exchange program that is currently run by the International Pharmaceutical Federation [FIP]. According to the FIP website, "Pharmbridge was founded by Agathe Wehrli in 1999, to foster communication, information, resources and experiences between pharmacists, pharmaceutical scientists, and pharmacy educators from across the globe, leading to better pharmacy services, improved patient care and enhanced community health".¹

On the other hand, University of Findlay's [UF] student & faculty exchange program was initiated by Professor Chandra Sekar [author of this article] at the University of Findlay in 2012. It was specifically set up to provide student exchange between the University of Findlay and selected institutions in India that had signed Memorandum of Understandings [MOU] with UF. In India, an educational degree that trained pharmacists with clinical expertise was only initiated in 2008, and this exchange program offered an opportunity for Indian students to learn about the role and

functions of pharmacists in various settings of practice in the United States (US).

For the UF students participating in this exchange, who potentially have spent all their lives in Ohio and had very little idea of life outside US – travel to India on this elective advanced pharmacy rotation provided an excellent opportunity to observe practice of healthcare in resource poor setting. Studies on comparative healthcare spending and outcomes in various developed nation demonstrates that while the US is number one in healthcare expenditures, its overall healthcare standing compared to other developed countries is abysmal.²

Currently, according to the FIP website, "Pharmbridge registrants includes around 2000 members, mostly individual members practicing in various pharmacy settings – such as faculties at the school of pharmacy, hospital pharmacy, community pharmacy and employed with ministries of healthcare in the government of their respective countries. First step in the Pharmbridge exchange is receipt of a request application by a member. While past requests have been for equipment, books, compounding etc., most of the current requests received are for training activities and pharmacy practice exposure."¹ Interestingly, UF student exchange program provide opportunity for students to visit and observe first-hand pharmacist provided services in different setting.

Pharmbridge administrators recognize the main challenge faced in their model. While original requests for books and information were easier to complete, current requests for matching participants who are interested in pharmacy practice exposure, with host institutions able to provide those requests are becoming more difficult to fulfill.

Between 2002 and 2018, 138 pharmacists, mostly faculties from University and Teaching Hospitals from various developing countries



were placed in 11 host countries. However, the majority of those participants were from Nigeria and India and the country which hosted them were the USA and UK. ¹ In UF's student exchange program around forty pharmacy students from 5 different institutions visited the University of Findlay over an 8 year period, from 2012 – 2020.

Some major differences that emerge in these two models are – while Pharmbridge caters to pharmacy professionals practice in all settings, UF's program is primarily directed to PharmD students. While faculty exchange is possible, very few faculty members have availed of this opportunity. Two major barriers are – institutions are often reluctant to provide financial travel support for the faculty and challenges arise on how to cover teaching responsibility while the faculty is away.

While Pharmbridge exchange is theoretically open to participants from all walks of pharmacy – in practice, most of them are academicians, who utilize the unique opportunity offered by FIP to travel internationally for personal and professional development. As there is no sustained follow-up mechanism, the real impact of “Pharmbridge Fellows” impact after their return to their home country is difficult to determine. In contrast, UF's exchange program that is initiated and sustained by an individual familiar and personally interested in seeing positive outcomes in the partnering country, results in sustained and long-term relationship that is amenable to outcome optimizations. For example, following evaluation of the first few visits, the bar for students participating in the program was raised by requiring them to submit an abstract for the National Pharmacy meeting - prior to receiving an invitation to participate in the exchange program. My annual visits to India with my exchange students enable me to

follow the changing healthcare scenario and fine tune the opportunities extended to the visiting students.

Thus far, our collaboration has resulted in half-a-dozen joint publications and conference presentations. It was gratifying to see that one student who spent few days at the UF's Medication Therapy Management Center [MTM] was the first employee to be hired by ‘Staffingly’ – a start-up company at that point, providing clinical pharmacist services to US nursing homes.

Besides Pharmbridge, the FIP foundation offers several grants and awards to participants all over the world to attend conferences as well as provide funding support for their participants. This year's recipient of the foundations Young Pharmacist Group Award for Pharmacy Innovation was Dr. Dallas Smith, who is an Alumni of the UF's pharmacy program and had traveled with me twice to India as an exchange student during his tenure as a pharmacy student at UF.

With its worldwide network of members, dedicated and committed membership around the globe – the virtual collaboration launched by FIP would be an attractive proposition for anyone who wants to impact pharmacy practice in the region of its choice.

References:

1. <https://www.fipfoundation.org/pharmbridge/pharmbridge-achievements/>
2. <https://www.pgpf.org/blog/2022/07/how-does-the-us-healthcare-system-compare-to-other-countries>



Comparison of Pharmbridge with UF's student exchange program:

	Pharmbridge	UF's Student Exchange
Institution	International Pharmaceutical Federation	The University of Findlay
Initiated by	Agathe Wehrli	Chandra Sekar
Members	Over 2000 members from 110 countries [2/3 of the members from developing country]	5 institutional collaborators from 1 country [India]
Number of participants	138 over a 12-year period	40 over an eight-year period
Training provided	Varied – depending on the interest of participant	Training structured – students visit various pharmacy practice sites, observe classroom delivery, and attend presentations on selected topics
Duration	One month	One month
Cost	FIP provides a stipend of Euro 500. Actual cost incurred by the participant data – not available	Participant are provided with highly discounted one month stay for \$450 – that includes boarding and lodging