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TRAVELING OVERSEAS TO ACHIEVE HER PROFESSIONAL DREAM

My name is Mahdis Bahrambeigi, and I am excited to share my experience of studying in India. I hail from Iran and am of Persian descent. My mother is a biology and computer science teacher and the vice principal of a special girls' high school in Iran, while my father is a businessman. Due to their professions, they have always held high expectations for my future career. As a child, I often played doctor-patient games with my cousins, nurturing a dream of becoming a pharmacist. This profession carries numerous advantages and garners great respect in Iran. However, achieving this goal in Iran is not easy, as there are significant challenges and many hurdles.

In Iran, gaining admission to medical colleges requires passing a rigorous exam, known as the KONKUR exam, similar to India's NEET exam. The KONKUR is widely regarded as the most challenging examination in Iran. While both KONKUR and NEET exams are demanding, a crucial distinction that exists is - in India, even with a lower NEET score, one can still secure a spot in medical universities. Conversely, in Iran, failing to achieve a high KONKUR score bars entry to any medical university.

Only thousand individuals in Iran are eligible

to pursue pharmacy studies at the university, with 500 seats reserved for special quotas. This stringent limitation posed a major obstacle to my dream of becoming a pharmacist. In search of viable options, I consulted with various agencies, ultimately leading me to consider studying in India. Given my circumstances, pursuing my dream course in India emerged as the most viable path, as there were no minimal exam score requirements, providing a more accessible route to achieving my aspirations.

While conducting research on universities in India through Google, I stumbled upon the website for Dayananda Sagar University's College of Pharmaceutical Sciences. As I delved into the college reviews, I noticed a recurring theme of admiration for the faculty members, who were lauded for their expertise and unwavering dedication. This positive feedback left a lasting impression on me and ultimately influenced my decision to enroll at Dayananda Sagar University in Bangalore.

For me, the presence of experienced and knowledgeable teachers was paramount in selecting a university. I commenced my academic journey at Dayananda Sagar University in 2021 and have since completed three years of study, now embarking on my fourth year in the Doctor of Pharmacy program. The most gratifying aspect of my time at DSU has been the opportunity to learn from exceptional educators, validating my initial trust in the reviews that guided me to this institution.

Transitioning to a new country with a distinct language and culture was a transformative experience, presenting a myriad of challenges. English, not being my native language, as having spent 12 years of schooling in Persian, further compounded the adjustment process. Despite the initial difficulties I encountered in my first year, I persevered with unwavering determination, committing myself to studying daily and work hard to bridge the gap with my



peers. Throughout this journey, my teachers emerged as my pillars of support and inspiration, offering encouragement and instilling the confidence necessary for my progress. During my academic journey, I was fortunate to have dedicated teachers who tirelessly supported me, answering my numerous questions with patience and encouragement. Their unwavering commitment to my success inspired me to work hard, resulting in academic success.

Had I remained in Iran, I might still be preparing for the KONKUR exam, squandering valuable time. Instead, I find myself now in my fourth year, equipped with enriching life experience, confident of living independently and trusting in my abilities and hard work. Pharmacists serve as a vital bridge between patients and registered medical practitioners, playing a pivotal role in the healthcare system. I have been privileged to learn from Dr. Kartik Rakam of Avendia, who has guided me in leveraging my pharmacy knowledge to shape a promising future. His emphasis on patient counseling and providing comprehensive medication information underscores the significant impact such practices can have on patients' health and well-being.

One of the challenges faced by those studying Doctor of Pharmacy in India is the lack of recognition and respect for pharmacists. Additionally, there is a general lack of awareness regarding the existence of Doctor of Pharmacy (PharmD) courses in India. While pharmacy practice in Iran and India shares some similarities, there are significant differences due to variations in healthcare systems, regulations, and educational structures. Here is an overview of the main distinctions.

The pharmacy industry in Iran has a rich

history dating back thousands of years, with references to the practice of medicine and the use of medicinal plants. However, the formal establishment of the modern pharmacy profession in Iran began in the early 20th century.

In the 1900s, the first pharmacy school was founded in Tehran in 1939, marking the beginning of formal education and training for pharmacists in the country. The profession continued to expand in the 1960s and 1970s, with the establishment of more educational institutions to enhance the quality and accessibility of pharmacy education.

Following the Iranian Revolution in 1979, the pharmacy industry underwent significant transformations, including the nationalization of pharmacies and a focus on local pharmaceutical production to reduce reliance on imported medications. Since then, the pharmacy sector in Iran has experienced growth, with a strong emphasis on pharmaceutical education, the production of generic medications, and the advancement of clinical pharmacy practices.

In Iran, obtaining a license to practice as a pharmacist entails completing a Doctor of Pharmacy (Pharm.D.) program, typically lasting six years. The Ministry of Health and Medical Education closely regulates pharmacy education in the country. Iranian pharmacists undergo rigorous clinical training, including internships in hospitals and community pharmacies, as part of their education. The pharmacy sector is heavily monitored by the Ministry of Health, with strict controls over drug distribution and pricing. Prescription medications are tightly regulated, while over-the-counter (OTC) medications have clear distinctions.

Iran boasts a robust pharmaceutical



manufacturing base, producing a significant portion of its drugs domestically, although it still relies on imports for certain specialized drugs. Pharmacists play a vital role in research and drug production, particularly within the generic drug industry. Patient counseling and ensuring adherence to medication regimens are crucial responsibilities for Iranian pharmacists, especially in urban areas. Pharmacists working in hospital settings often collaborate with interdisciplinary teams.

The pharmacy industry in India began to take shape in the early 20th century, marked by the establishment of formal pharmacy education. Here are the key milestones related to the inception of the pharmacy industry and pharmacy schools in India.

In the early 20th century, the modern pharmacy profession in India began to take shape with the introduction of Western medicine during British colonial rule. European-trained doctors started to establish pharmacies in urban areas, laying the foundation for a formal pharmaceutical practice. In 1948, the Pharmacy Act was passed, providing a regulatory framework for the pharmacy profession in India. This legislation was instrumental in setting standards for pharmacy practice and education. The following year, the Banaras Hindu University established the first pharmacy college in India, offering the first-degree course in pharmacy and marking the formal beginning of pharmacy education in the country.

From the 1950s to the 1970s, several more pharmacy colleges were established throughout India, contributing to the professionalization of pharmacy education. The Indian Pharmaceutical Association (IPA) was also founded in 1948 to advocate for the

profession and support pharmacists.

Following India's independence in 1947, the government implemented policies to promote the production of indigenous drugs, leading to growth in the pharmaceutical industry, the establishment of more pharmacies, and the expansion of pharmacy education.

In India, pharmacy education offers flexibility, with students able to pursue a Diploma in Pharmacy (D.Pharm) (2 years), a Bachelor of Pharmacy (B.Pharm) (4 years), or a Doctor of Pharmacy (Pharm.D.) (6 years). While Pharm.D. is a relatively newer program in India compared to other countries like Iran, it includes clinical training and is gradually gaining acceptance and creating opportunities in clinical settings. The Pharmacy Council of India (PCI) oversees pharmacy education, while the "Drugs and Cosmetics Act" governs the manufacturing, distribution, and sale of drugs. Despite the existence of prescription regulations, enforcement can be lax, particularly in rural areas. Over-the-counter medications are readily available, and in many instances, prescription-only drugs can be dispensed without a valid prescription.

In comparing pharmacy practices between Iran and India, it is evident that while both countries emphasize drug dispensing and education, Iran places a greater emphasis on the clinical role of pharmacists. In contrast, India is still in the process of developing this aspect, particularly through the expansion of its Pharm.D. programs.

Upon completion of the Pharm.D. program, my goal is to utilize my knowledge and skills to contribute to the betterment of my country and its people. To achieve this, I will need to successfully complete the equivalency exams



required to practice as a Doctor of Pharmacy in Iran. For individuals in Iran seeking to work as licensed pharmacists with a Pharm.D. degree obtained abroad, there are specific steps and eligibility criteria they must meet. These include completing a Pharm.D. program, having foreign degrees recognized by the Ministry of Health, passing the National Pharmacy Licensing Exam, fulfilling any necessary internship or residency requirements, obtaining a pharmacy license from the Ministry of Health, meeting additional employment criteria based on the sector, and maintaining licensure through ongoing education and compliance with regulations.

Reflecting on my journey, I now understand that it was truly a time of personal growth. I am deeply grateful to my parents for their constant support, guidance, and encouragement every step of the way.

I firmly believe that in any place you find yourself, there will always be both challenges and opportunities. It is crucial to maintain a positive mindset, have faith in yourself, and dedicate your full effort to turning your aspirations into achievements.

As one chapter of my life comes to a close, I eagerly anticipate the new beginnings that lie ahead.