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## FROM NEPAL TO INDIA TO UNITED STATES – A STUDENT PHARMACIST’S JOURNEY

It was a tough decision for me to leave Kathmandu - the only city I'd ever lived in, for continuing with my Pharm D studies in Bangalore, India. Back home, I was this shy girl with a small group of friends and would be intimidated by strangers or new faces. I still remember my first night at the hostel in India and I could barely close my eyes. But now I have no choice - I had chosen to live here, at least for 6 long years. Every night I would talk to my parents for hours. Slowly I began adjusting and got along well with my teachers and friends. Bangalore taught me a lot. It taught me to be independent, stay confident, to struggle to hold onto a spot and keep moving no matter what. Now when I look back, I can see a lot of differences between who I was and who I am now after 5 years!

PharmD is a relatively new course in India. The scope of how a pharmacist can contribute to patient care in Indian scenario is unclear. Having heard of how pharmacists in States is an integral part of the elite healthcare team, who contribute through active involvement in improving the quality of care while reducing the medication and related errors was fascinating to me. And when the opportunity

of visiting Findlay to gain firsthand experience through an exchange program between Karnataka College of Pharmacy and the University of Findlay [UF] was presented to me, I wasn't going to let it slip.

Upon arriving at UF, I started attending classes. Cardio, GI, Oncology, Neuro one after the other. I wouldn't miss any modules or electives whatsoever. While I didn't find much difference in the content being taught, I found the approach of everyone involved to be significantly different. One thing I noticed was that most of the teachers here were also involved in clinically practicing pharmaceutical science one way or the other. They'd explain each portion in such a way, that it would reflect to its significance in real world setting. They constantly conducted quizzes, tests and gave assignments after each sessions, to evaluate the understanding of students. As of students, they were always within the campus premises acquiring knowledge one way or the other. Another important fact I came to recognize was how most of my new friends here would spend their evenings or free times working part time jobs in Pharmacies. Not only it would decrease their financial dependence by generating income, it would also better prepare them for their future careers.

As a part of the rotations scheduled here, I visited UFMTMTHC (University of Findlay Medication Therapy Management and Tele Health Centre) for a day. It was a completely new experience for me. I watched pharmacists here call patients and check with their medication list and update their refills, look for any interactions, counsel them about drug facts and answer their queries on drugs. All the students from first year could work at this center. Here I realized how such centers can aid the patients in solving their medication related problem with a simple phone call. I learned how a modest counselling can satisfactorily educate the patient and influence their medication compliance, medication refill and health



awareness. I felt empowered to witness a pharmacist having a direct impact on the patient health care.

The other place I went to was Wyandot Memorial Hospital. It is a 25 bedded community Hospital for Wyandot County residents. I met the Director of the pharmacy department, Dr. Scott Gier there, who happens to be a very polite and interactive person. Mary Ann, a clinical pharmacist took the task of showing me around. We ran across nursing stations, intensive care units, surgical areas etc. while she explained to me about roles and responsibilities of a pharmacist in each section there. One item that caught my eye was a device named Pyxis™ MedStation™ system. It is an automated medication dispensing system that supports

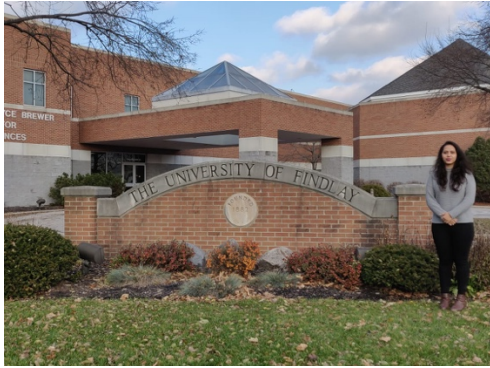
decentralized medication management with various features for safety and efficiency. The system helps accurately dispense medication, while supporting pharmacy workflows <sup>[1]</sup>. I realized the hospital was very specific on quality and organization. I also got to see different departments and different medical devices like hyperbaric oxygen therapy chamber for the treatment of non-healing wounds. The treatment involves exposing the patient with 100% oxygen at high atmospheric pressure that accelerates the wound healing process. Another aspect that captivated me was Swing Bed program. It was meant for the patients those were too fit to be inpatient but still at risk to be outpatient. For such individual, hospital provides various physical and occupational therapies based on their condition like gym for fitness, hot water pool to improve mobility and strength after injury etc.

Next I visited Wyandot Hospice Centre. It is a facility designed specifically to provide palliative care to people at chronic stages of

various conditions which are best left untreated. Typically accommodating geriatric patients, the center made it apparent that the care given here is more of a supportive nature, including attending to their emotional and spiritual needs. The main goal of the support is to comfort the patients during latter stages of their lives. Physicians visit them frequently along with pharmacist and prescribe medications that comfort the patient's immediate symptoms like pain and help relive it for routine tasks. Based on the patient's need, nurses and care givers too visit them.

I also got a chance to witness a hospice meeting. The Doctor, Nurses, Pharmacist, other Social workers, and support representatives were present in the discussion. Each patient was looked in to with all ups and downs going on. Everyone was welcome to make a comment on the present scenario of the patient while targeting the patient's welfare. Each comment was considered and changes were made based of patient's best option at that point of time. Small details like mood swings, agitation, freshness of patient was taken into account which I found really thoughtful. Accordingly, pharmacist would recommend the appropriate drug along with best suitable drug and

dosage form. The role of pharmacist in choosing the drug and adjusting the dose of the drug that best suits the patient's condition is very crucial. Pharmacist would go through all the history and the comorbidities and come up with the best option of the drugs that helps patients comfort their immediate symptoms and ease them.



Finally, I visited Blanchard Valley Medical Associates, Inc. (BVMA). There I got to spend time with Dr Suzanne M. Surowiec, PharmD., BCAC at Coumadin clinic. This was a new experience for me. We don't have such clinics operated by pharmacist in India. Patients on Warfarin were referred to Coumadin clinic. A pharmacist would then carry out the PT/INR test and adjust the dose of warfarin if required. At first visit to this clinic, patients were informed regarding the test about to be performed, role of Warfarin and why the test was so essential. Patients are also required to give a written consent that they have understood and are ready to follow up. They are also provided with the detailed written information about the drug Warfarin, its mechanism of action, how vitamin K in particular affects its action and the dietary precautions they had to follow. INR of each patient was tested and the dose of warfarin was adjusted accordingly. Other risk factors and the fluctuation in the past INR values were considered to schedule next test. Patients were asked various questions about the symptoms like bleeding, falling, missed dose, headaches, easy bruising, any plan on surgeries etc. All this information was utilized to adjust the dose and schedule the nest visit.

What amazed me the most is how concerned the patients were regarding their doses and INR readings. All the patients I saw were very eager to

know about their INR values and followed up in their given time. They had many queries about their health, diet and well being. Dr Surowiec was really kind to explain all the queries they had and handled each patient courteously. This sums up my stay at UF.

I came in search of my career options. This place and people here have taught me how passion is more important than competition, how struggle to obtain your dream is important than the struggle for a job. I saw professors here who are so passionate about their fields and how they enjoy explaining each and every detail. Thanks to Dr Sekar, he made me realize how what I want to do, is much more important than what people expect me to do.

Coming towards the end of my stay at UF, when I look back, I feel really grateful for all the first-hand experiences I got to witness here. I heartily thank Dr M Chandra Sekar from UF and Dr Raju Koneri from Karnataka College of Pharmacy for organizing the exchange programme and for acknowledging how a student exchange can help aspirants experience the pharmacy setting in different countries.

#### References:

1. Baker, J., Draves, M., Ramudhin, A. Analysis of the Medication Management System in Seven Hospitals. edBPM whitepaper, 2008.