


# Chapter 5

## Bridging Pharmacy Education and Health Humanities: The Contribution of Narrative Medicine to Pharmacists' Caring Abilities

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### ABSTRACT

*Pharmacy education is largely based on learning elements of disease and the corresponding elements of treatment, using the natural sciences and the biomedical perspective. While this is central for competent pharmacists in working on the research, production, and use of drugs, many professionals deal with people suffering from ill-health. Developing clinical roles requires, besides the traditional pharmaceutical knowledge, the ability to understand illness experiences from the perspectives of patients and significant others. Health humanities provide important resources to link human traits and biomedical knowledge, essential for sensitive and responsive pharmacy practice. The chapter aims to explore emerging opportunities for pharmacists' thinking and working with patients offered by the developing movement of health humanities and narrative medicine.*

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## INTRODUCTION

### Pharmacists as Professionals Engaged in Caring for Individuals' Health

It is widely accepted that pharmacists have long been recognized as healthcare professionals. From the medieval apothecaries until today, pharmacists have contributed to the well-being of citizens mainly through the preparation and dispensation of drugs and health products to the public.

International organizations, such as the World Health Organization (WHO), state that *community pharmacists are the healthcare professionals most accessible to the public* (World Health Organization, 1997). Being often the first port of call, they are trusted by patients to deal with health matters, pharmacists have developed patient care competencies (Wiedenmayer et al., 2006).

Within the European Union (EU), pharmacists' qualifications are automatically recognized between member states (European Parliament, 2013). The Directive 2013/55/EU Article 45 (#2), amongst other expected competencies, specified the personalized support for patients by those administering their medication, which comprises also the dispensing accountability.

The International Pharmaceutical Federation (FIP) states that pharmacists have to communicate effectively (i.e. clearly, precisely and appropriately) with patients, healthcare staff, supporting staff, carers, family relatives and other clients; also, pharmacists should tailor communications to patients' needs, including demonstrating cultural awareness and sensitivity (International Pharmaceutical Federation, 2012).

These requirements strongly advocate that pharmacists' education should comprise training in the so-called Health and Medical Humanities. These are concerned with healthcare and its engagement with the humanities and arts, incorporating patients and the general public experience (Cole, Carlin, & Carson, 2015).

## BACKGROUND

### Health and Medical Humanities: An Overview

Over the last few decades, Health and Medical Humanities grew out of Bioethics and brought aesthetic tools to medicine and healthcare education, improving the ability to think and act otherwise about health and illness (Alan Bleakley, 2020).

The acquisition and development of features like empathy towards patients and a deeper understanding and accompaniment of their suffering, regarding each condition, has an important role in caregiving. The need to recognize as well the

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