

Future of History of Pharmacy in the Professional Curricula

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The future of teaching the history of pharmacy will revolve around the same two interrelated phenomena that it always has: the first being the identification and attraction of persons interested in teaching the subject, and the second being the training and equipping of these persons.

The first objective should not be all that difficult, as most schools will usually harbor at least one faculty member with an amateur interest in the subject. Should none exist, then the surrounding community (if of moderate size or larger) will almost certainly contain one or more persons interested in history in general, and possibly the history of things of a medical bent. In the unlikely event no one meets these descriptions, then current telecommunications and CD-ROM technology are certainly capable of bringing the subject into any campus. What then, are the barriers to these options?

For junior full-time, tenure-track faculty, time and energy devoted to historical pursuits generally carry little weight with most promotion and tenure criteria. If these faculty are to be expected to teach history, they must be equipped to do so in a manner that requires relatively little effort or research. Methods that provide "canned" lectures, videos, and simple demonstrations would do so. These faculty typically have little opportunity to obtain off-campus training in teaching history, since they do not qualify for sabbaticals and rarely have the time or funds to do so on their own. This is not likely to change.

Senior tenured faculty, by comparison, have the luxury of being able

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to indulge (relatively speaking) their historical interests to some degree, but even this time is under increasing pressure to be productive in other areas. While it may be possible to provide them with a higher level of off-campus training (e.g., the Teaching Improvement Award), schools are likely to prefer to invest their sabbatical dollars in areas more conducive to future financial payback. This situation is not likely to change any time soon, if at all. Again, providing these persons with complete teaching modules may also be necessary, albeit they could be supplemented with off-campus "short-courses."

As for the community, truly amateur historian, unaccustomed to preparing and delivering educational materials in a structured format, the need for pre-designed and constructed modules is greatest. Over time these individuals can become adept instructors if given the proper support and acknowledgment. Their relative low cost would make such persons attractive to those schools who wish to offer such a course but whose budgets preclude devoting even a modicum of faculty salary monies to such endeavors.

In any event, if history of pharmacy topics are to survive, they will do so only if offered in a user-friendly, universally applicable technology at a relatively low cost. How will this be possible? On the one hand, persons and organizations with a vested interest in the survival of historical studies (professional historians and their associations) must be called upon to lend their expertise to the creation of these self-contained teaching modules so as to assure their accuracy and overall quality. In so doing production would be accomplished with maximum efficiency, for these persons are most knowledgeable about what resources would best showcase a particular topic. Organizations can ensure the overall continuity and quality of the component modules. Once created, these modules could then be effectively marketed by the organization(s) involved.

For their part, schools can help ensure the survival of their professional legacy by procuring these programs and facilitating their utilization. Funding for such procurements could be aided by the help of interested alumni, who could designate donations for the purchase of these materials and perhaps be honored or memorialized in the process.

Production costs could be underwritten by corporate or foundation funding, similar to those efforts undertaken by Glaxo-Wellcome in its highly successful Medicines: The Inside Story project. Such efforts would carry a long-term measure of good will.

As to which technologies to use, the answer lies in costs of production, reproduction, and usage. Manuals are relatively inexpensive to produce, can be reproduced also inexpensively, and can be relatively

easily changed or updated. Manuals, however, have a limited life span in that they can be used by only a few students or student groups before destructing. Audio tapes are cheap to make, reproduce and alter, but lack the visual stimulation so many view as essential to learning. They, too, have limited lifespans. Videotapes are more expensive to produce, but like audiotapes, are inexpensive to reproduce. They are, however, more difficult to update and they, too, have a limited lifespan. The advantages to using CD-ROM technology are its relatively low cost of reproduction and high degree of durability. Several discs could be enough for an entire class if it progressed self-paced. The disadvantages are the relative unalterability of content once produced and the high cost of initial production. Given the nature of historical research (as opposed to that of, say therapeutics) the lack of content flexibility should be of minor concern. Production costs do create a formidable barrier.

Satellite transmission of course content is too expensive to consider at this time. Possible advances in telecommunications do offer another set of transfer, but will, likely be initially quite costly.