



Medication Prescribing by Pharmacists: **Contributing to Global Evidence Base**



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In this article, Prof. Derek Stewart and Dr. Zachariah Nazar of the College of Pharmacy at Qatar University describe how research is informing the development of the practice of pharmacy across the world and specifically within Qatar.

Over the last two decades, there have been significant developments in the practice of pharmacy across the world. This practice has developed from what was traditionally viewed as being product and supply focused, to a more clinical, patient and person focused approach. While prescribing of medicines has traditionally been restricted to doctors, rapid advancements in healthcare policies and practices have led to the introduction of pharmacists prescribing medicines in several countries including the UK, USA, Canada and New Zealand. A number of other countries, including Qatar, are exploring the potential for expanding the work of pharmacists to include prescribing of medicines.

Pharmacist prescribing is most developed in the UK, with legal changes enabling the implementation of prescribing in 2003. In the UK, pharmacist prescribers can prescribe, within their competence, the same range of medicines as doctors. There is a specific, accredited education program at graduate level which must be completed prior to a pharmacist being registered as a pharmacist prescriber with the licensing body, the General Pharmaceutical Council.

Before joining Qatar University in 2019 and at Robert Gordon University, Professor Derek Stewart led the development of education programs for pharmacist prescribers in Scotland and led an internationally renowned research group culminating in more than 40 peer reviewed papers, a significant research grant income and PhD completions. This group collaborated with many key individuals and networks across the world, including the faculty at Qatar University College of Pharmacy (Dr. Mohammad Diab, Professor Ahmed Awaisu, Dr. Alla El-Awaisi, Dr. Monica Zolezzi and Dr. Zachariah Nazar) and Hamad Medical Corporation (HMC) (Dr. Moza Al Hail, Dr. Abdulrouf Pallivalapila, Dr. Wessam El Kassem and Dr. Binny Thomas).

This research has made a significant contribution to the global literature providing overwhelming evidence of the effectiveness and safety of pharmacist prescribing. For example, a review of 46 studies of prescribing by pharmacists compared to doctors for a range of short- and long-term conditions demonstrated that pharmacists were at least as effective and safe as doctors. Dr. Tesnime Jebara is a graduate of the College of Pharmacy at Qatar University who completed her PhD at Robert Gordon University under the supervision of Professor Derek, with input from Professor Ahmed and the HMC team. The first paper from her PhD was a review of all studies across the world researching the views of the public, patients, doctors, nurses, pharmacists, and others on pharmacist prescribing. There was tremendous support with positive benefits in terms of care of patients and satisfaction of that care provided, producing evidence of acceptance of pharmacist prescribing by many different groups. Dr. Tesnime then proceeded to the next study, which involved in-depth interviews with a number of key individuals in Qatar representing senior doctors, pharmacists and nurses from a number of health institutions. She also interviewed representatives from the University, healthcare policy makers, and representatives of patients and the public. There was high level of support for the expansion of pharmacists' roles to include prescribing of medicines. Amongst the important findings was the need to describe how pharmacist prescribing would actually work in Qatar, and to progress the issues of education and training.

The need to discuss licensing of pharmacists as prescribers with the Department of Healthcare Professions at the Ministry of Public Health in Qatar was also taken note of. In the next PhD study, Tesnime worked with the same group to develop a framework to support the potential development and implementation of pharmacist prescribing in Qatar.

A number of related research studies at Qatar University have contributed to developing the knowledge around pharmacist prescribing. Dr. Mohammad Diab and others studied the views of future pharmacists on pharmacist prescribing, and its potential implementation in Qatar. The majority were in favour of implementing pharmacist prescribing in Qatar. Results showed that there was a need for a specific education program to qualify pharmacists to prescribe safely and effectively. A mapping of the Bachelor of Science in Pharmacy at Qatar University against international prescribing competencies found that the program already addressed most of the prescribing competencies.

Since arriving in Qatar, Professor Derek has continued the international research on pharmacist prescribing. Along with Dr. Zachariah Nazar and individuals at HMC, research funding was received as part of Hamad Internal Grant Research Cycle. This study was very recently published in the International Journal of Clinical Pharmacy. It studied HMC pharmacists' desire to become pharmacist prescribers, and how ready they felt to undertake education to become prescribers. The study was a combination of a questionnaire followed up by in-depth discussion groups. Most of those returning the questionnaire considered themselves ready to undertake prescribing, particularly those in senior positions. Discussion group findings provided further explanation of these results, highlighting the desire to improve patient care, safety and personal drive.

Qatar University is leading the Middle East in pharmacist prescribing research. It is important to translate the findings of these studies to actual practice. The group at the College of Pharmacy is now working with Dr. Moza Al Hail (the Executive Director of Pharmacy at HMC), her team, and representatives of the Ministry of Public Health. Plans are developing to submit a proposal to Qatar University to develop and implement an education program for pharmacist prescribers. This is being developed from existing programs across the world, particularly from the UK and Canada.

Finally, the authors acknowledge the input of other key faculty members from the College of Pharmacy at Qatar University to specific research studies included in this program, namely Dr. Mohammad Diab, Prof. Ahmed Awaisu, Dr. Alla El-Awaisi, and Dr. Monica Zolezzi.