

## Building undergraduate pharmacy students' sense of Professional Identity during Experiential Learning (EL) in hospital pharmacy



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Patient centred hospital experiential learning to develop future pharmacists



### Introduction

Professional identity (PI) formation is an essential aspect of developing as future pharmacist. There is no agreed definition of PI, but it is considered to be a multifaceted interaction between an individual's perception of themselves and their career<sup>1,2</sup>.

There are two Schools of Pharmacy in Northern Ireland (NI), Queens University Belfast and Ulster University, with an annual intake of between 250 and 300 students per annum across the country. Students complete a total of 6 weeks of Experiential Learning (EL) in Hospital Pharmacy during their four-year pharmacy undergraduate degree.

Pharmacy students participate in authentic clinical pharmacy activities during their periods of EL, are invited into the pharmacy team and work alongside pharmacist and pharmacy technician colleagues at clinic and ward level to manage real patient problems.

### Results

Response rates to the evaluation questionnaires were 72% (202/279) year 2, 66% (161/245) year 3 and 65% (160/245) from year 4. Student responses, agree or strongly agree to three key statements were used to evaluate their evolving professional identity;

1. I felt part of the hospital pharmacy team in the clinical area I was allocated during hospital EL (year 2; 80%, year 3; 76%, year 4 (96%))
2. I felt inspired by the pharmacists that I interacted during my hospital EL (year 2; 87%, year 3; 95%, year 4; 98%)
3. After my hospital EL, I feel better prepared to be a pharmacist (year 2; 89%, year 3; 92%, year 4; 97%). (see Figure 1).

Pharmacy Students' Professional Identity formation

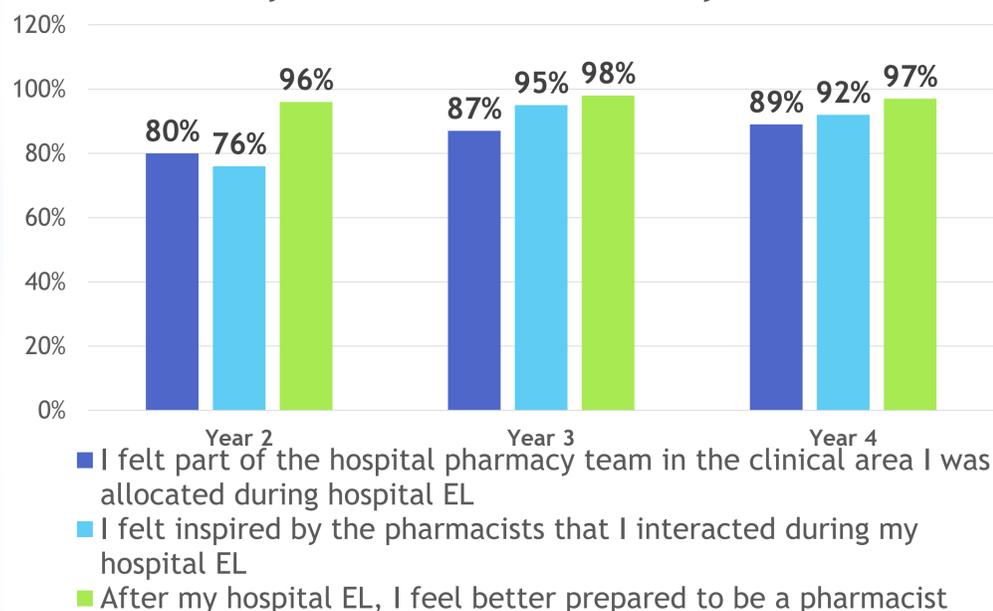


Figure 1

### Discussion

Pharmacy student participating in Experiential Learning (EL) during the pharmacy degree offers an opportunity for students to engage in real-life practice and interact with role models, helping to shape their understanding of their future role as a pharmacist. EL in hospital practice offers pharmacy undergraduates the opportunity to develop their professional identity by completing authentic pharmacist activities, and interacting with pharmacist role models.

All students felt part of the team and were inspired by the pharmacists they met, but those in higher year groups were more likely to strongly agree (SA) or agree (A) with these statements. All year groups SA or A that after EL they felt better prepared to be a pharmacist. Students with a strong sense of Professional Identity can reportedly transition more readily into the workplace, have greater self-confidence in fulfilling their requirements of their role, particularly more complex and uncertain aspects of practice. Hospital based EL offers a way to enhance the development of PI during the Pharmacy degree.

### Aim

To explore opinions of year 2, 3 and 4 students on whether their recent period of experiential learning in hospital made them feel more like a pharmacist.

### Method

Year 2, year 3 and year 4 pharmacy students from both schools of pharmacy in Northern Ireland participate in 6 weeks of experiential learning (EL) in a hospital setting during their pharmacy degree. All students who completed EL in 2024-25 (n=769) were invited to complete an anonymous evaluation questionnaire with Likert style questions shared via QR code. Data was collected using Microsoft forms and analysed primarily by descriptive statistics.

### References

1. Crossley, J., & Vivekananda-Schmidt, P. (2009). The development and evaluation of a professional self identity questionnaire to measure evolving professional self-identity in health and social care students. *Medical Teacher*, 31, e603-7. <https://doi.org/10.3109/01421590903193547>
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