



## **Review of 'Women pharmacists – Always One Step Ahead' 12<sup>th</sup> European Women Pharmacists Meeting**

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### **CONFERENCE DETAILS**

Date: 30th September 2017

Location: Vienna, Austria

### **REVIEW**

The extent to which women pharmacists experience the same challenges as women in other STEMM disciplines is unknown. The evidence is patchy and often anecdotal (see Collins, 2016 and O'Keefe, 2017), but in the absence of information to the contrary it is reasonable to assume the challenges are the same. The scale is impossible to judge, but there are steps that can be taken individually and collectively to boost the chances of women pharmacists thriving as well as their male colleagues.

It was these steps that were the focus of the 12<sup>th</sup> European Women Pharmacists Meeting (EWPM) in Vienna in September 2017. The objective was to help women pharmacists to fulfil their full potential, and simultaneously to support a wider aim of securing a place for gender-related career issues on the pharmacy workforce agenda. This is routinely absent, with 'career development pathways' paying scant attention to the needs or aptitudes of the individual.

Numerically, most pharmacists across Europe work in community pharmacy, with the next largest number working in the hospital sector. There are nevertheless a substantial number working in industry, academia, regulatory affairs, publishing, inspectorates, policy affairs or other sectors. If an individual anticipates needing flexibility in their personal career path, it is particularly helpful to have some understanding of the full range of career options available and of the potential to move between them.

The one-day programme was drawn up by a group of pharmacists from five European countries, Europe being defined geographically and thus not limited to the EU. It was attended by 56 women pharmacists from 11 countries, all of whom were attending as individuals and not as delegates or representatives.



The meeting took the form of English language talks and workshops relating to different work sectors, from different countries, intended to be relevant to individuals at all career stages.

Although organised internationally, the venue and logistical support were supplied by the Austrian Association of Employed Pharmacists (Verband Angestellter Apotheker Osterreichs; VAAO). After a welcome from Prof Elfriede Dolinar, a former president of the European Association of Hospital Pharmacists (EAHP), it was appropriate that the opening addresses were delivered by Raimund Podroschko and Norbert Valecka, the President and Director of VAAO, respectively. During these addresses, attendees unfamiliar with pharmacy in Austria had their first insight into the unusual salary and employment conditions of Austrian community pharmacists. These were drawn up following a 'discrimination against women' ruling by the Austrian Constitutional Court in 1999. Details were described later in the day.

The programme continued with a review of the Dutch undergraduate and masters pharmacy curriculum changes by Dr Martina Teichert from Leiden University, who outlined changes designed for the future. Inevitably the battle for teaching time between science and clinical practice featured, as it always does. She was followed by Helen Kilminster, a Senior Clinical Pharmacist in the first phase of the NHS England GP Pharmacists Pilot scheme, who described the NHS England initiative to introduce and fund pharmacists within GP surgeries, to boost medicines optimisation. At that date, Helen's role was part time (P/T), and in previous commentaries Helen had noted how satisfactory this was. Unfortunately, in Vienna she reported that the next pilot phase was expressly discouraging P/T workers because of the costs of training the GP pharmacists.

There then followed a resume of the European Common Training Framework for hospital pharmacists, presented by Joan Peppard from the Republic of Ireland who is the current President of EAHP. Of particular interest here was the gradual progress to allow cross-border European recognition of specialities, which takes basic mutual recognition arrangements further. The regulatory and inspectorate sectors were discussed next, by Dr Verena Plattner, Inspector at the Austrian Medicine and Medical Devices Agency. The options within regulation and inspectorates are certainly considerable, and ones where pharmacists with different backgrounds can find roles matching their personal expertise. Having experience of what needs to be regulated or inspected is an obvious asset.

Workshops exploring the themes already described along with options within the pharmaceutical industry then followed, but the final talk of the day described the impact of the Austrian Salary Fund on women pharmacists. This was presented by Ulrike Mayer, Chair of this community pharmacy payment fund. In brief, rather than individual employers paying their employed pharmacists, they pay a nationally negotiated fee into the fund, which in turn pays each pharmacist according to an agreed framework specifying hours of work, bi-annual salary increments, and numerous benefits. It is compulsory for employers and employees to belong to the scheme, originally set up in 1908. All P/T work is paid pro-rata, but what is truly unusual are the post-1999 arrangements whereby: 1. salary increments are linked to years in employment, whether P/T or F/T, and 2. parental leave (within limits) counts as years in employment and not as years of absence. It is easy for pharmacists to get P/T work in Austria, where 89% of pharmacists are women, of whom around 80% work P/T.

All good meetings collect feedback from attendees and, apart from details, it was clear that the single most valued aspect was the opportunity to network and exchange views with colleagues.

Coincidentally, a week earlier the International Pharmaceutical Federation (a global body comprising primarily 140 national organisations plus academic institutional members) had agreed 13 workforce development goals (FIP, 2016). Number 10 is to achieve gender and diversity balances within the overall pharmaceutical workforce – thus making the EWPM meeting especially timely.

## **REFERENCES**

- Collins, A. (2016). C+D Salary Survey: Gender pay gap doubles in a year. *Chemist and Druggist*, 11th July 2016. Available at: <https://www.chemistanddruggist.co.uk/news/gender-pay-gap-increases-pharmacists>
- O’Keefe S. (2017). The inspiring women of pharmacy. England Blog. Royal Pharmaceutical Society, 8<sup>th</sup> March 2017. Available at: <http://blog.rpharms.com/england/2017/03/08/inspiring-women-in-pharmacy/>
- FIP (2016). Pharmaceutical Workforce Development Goals, November 2016. Available at: [www.fip.org/educationreports](http://www.fip.org/educationreports)