

Renaissance in the Pharmacist Profession on the Basis of Its Origin

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It seems that the pharmacy has been too much concerned about either science or professional business, neglecting the pharmaceutical identity. Here, we the pharmacists should consider the root how the pharmacist profession was born. The most important role of pharmacists in their own profession is to review the prescriptions written by physicians. This concept of reviewing was established by Fredric II, King of Sicilia in Europe in 1240. That was the origin of pharmacist as a profession which was based on the complete professional separation between physicians and pharmacists with a mutual surveillance system. It looks like a separation of power as the Upper and the Lower Houses in the Diet for legislation. In other words, all the pharmaceutical activities come from this philosophy of pharmacy.

Originally it is dangerous for a patient if a drug for him/her is selected and also dispensed by the same person, as the patient sometime may be poisoned to death intentionally in the most extreme case. In addition to such an intentional abuse of drug, there are many possibilities of mistakes in medication. As there is a saying "To error is human," we cannot be absolutely away from a mistake or defect in medication. In general, in order to reduce mistakes, we usually check a matter twice, which is called a double check. However, if checked twice by the same person, there is a high probability of repeating the same mistake, which is human. If checked twice by two different people, which means a crosscheck, we may be able to reduce mistakes dramatically in order to make the absolute zero defect (ZD), as is the wisdom of human being. Upon the same concept, Good Manufacturing Practice (GMP) has been established by forming the check-system both by the production and the quality control divisions, which are independent of each other with a mutual surveillance. The first check during the process is done by the production division, but the second or final check before shipping is done by the quality control division.

In medication this type of the second checking does belong to the pharmacist profession; first checked by a physician upon prescribing and second by a pharmacist in reviewing the prescription and dispensing, then the safety for patients is guaranteed. A prescription being

reviewed by a pharmacist, a physician should be very careful in writing prescription, leading a profound medication.

However, we often forget the importance of reviewing which is necessarily included in dispensing, and look at the apparent operation work of dispensing without the surveillance for physicians' prescribing, as represented by the existing Japanese "Iyaku-bungyo," which is not common in Europe/America. The "Iyaku-bungyo" in Japan is changing gradually to its appropriate situation. However, still only a very few cases, i.e., less than 10% of the whole prescriptions are decided by physicians with the advise of pharmacists, while over 70% in Europe/America as many physicians consult with pharmacists before writing prescription. If the dispensing by a pharmacist would be composed of operation work only, any other person than he/she could do that, as has been considered in Japan, resulting in the incomplete separation of power of dispensing from physician's job. Over 100 years ago, when the medicare law was first established in Japan, only pharmacists could dispense, but later soon a powerful medical doctor Dr. Tai Hasegawa strongly proposed such a exception that doctors can dispense for their own patients. Pharmaceutical people then did not protest fully against it, and finally this situation has been dominating the country until now. Usually an exception is for a few percentages of cases, and this incomplete separation has been major. The reason why this situation has been common is due to the lack of the social education about the pure profession of a pharmacist to people in the society. In this regard, Korea is the most advanced country in Asia. I deeply hope Korean pharmacists will take a leadership to enhance the stream of dispensing in Asia as the pure pharmacists.

Finally, the decisive factor of pharmacist profession is "Ethics". As described above, a pharmacist reviews the physician's prescription. That is, a physician is checked by pharmacist. Then, who checks the pharmacist? No body checks him/her. He/she should be checked by his/her own ethics, as is the origin of a word "ethics." Its etymology is concerned with the fact that we say an "ethical drug" for a prescription drug, which is handled by a pharmacist. I think this type mutual surveillance system may exist in other business fields such as companies, but the pharmacist profession was for the first to have it among all of them. Therefore, "ethics" is the soul of a pharmacist, a man of ethics, who does not do wrong and do best in assuring the zero defect for medication. It is not easy but extremely important to educate such a man of the profession both with an excellent ability and personality. Now, not only in Korea, but also in China, Japan and other countries are under the way to change the situation, hoping these factors will be considered on the basis of the pharmacist profession.