

Bridging Opportunities

A Filipino pharmacist's Pharmabridge experience in Finland

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Pharmabridge is an initiative supported by the International Pharmaceutical Federation (FIP) Board of Pharmacy Practice. It aims to strengthen pharmaceutical services and pharmacy education in developing and transitional countries through coordinated support from individual pharmacists and pharmacy institutions in developed and more advanced developing countries. One of the programs of the FIP Pharmabridge is the "individual practice exposure" where pharmacists are placed into pharmacy practice sites for 4 weeks. Last November 2013, I was privileged to be given the opportunity to undergo my pharmacy practice exposure in Helsinki, Finland under the FIP Pharmabridge program through Dr. Agathe Wehrli of Pharmabridge; Ms. Eeva Terasalmi, Vice President of FIP and Owner of Seven Brothers Pharmacy; Ms. Sirpa Peura of The Association of Finnish Pharmacies and Dr. Marja Airaksinen of the Division of Social Pharmacy, University of Helsinki.

My first practice site was at the Suomen Apteekkariliitto or The Association of Finnish Pharmacies (AFP). At the AFP, I saw how pharmacy owners in Finland are doing their best to cope with the demands of the changing profession. In my interactions with the people at the Association, I learned the various programs/projects/services that the Association provides such as the Database of Pharmaceutical Preparations; e-Prescription (e-Resepti); online pharmacy (e-Apteekki); handling of compounding inquiries; medication safety tools; allergy/asthma, diabetes and heart programs; branding campaign; and its various communication materials and publications. I was also introduced to the Association's group of companies: PharmaPress, PharmaService, Pharmadata and Medifon—all of which complement the vision and goals of the AFP. I was also able to learn Finland's medicines policy as well as the pharmacy system particularly the regulation of the pharmacy license and the prices of medicines. I also had the chance to attend a seminar by Mr. John Chave, Secretary General of the Pharmaceutical Group of the European Union, regarding self-care in Europe. My stay at the Association of Finnish Pharmacies was a perfect way to start my Pharmabridge program for it gave me an overview of the Finnish healthcare system and how Finnish pharmacists deliver quality pharmaceutical care services while sustaining business profitability.

My second practice site was at Seitsemän Veljeksen Apteekki or Seven Brothers Pharmacy in Nurmijärvi, Finland. During my first day at the pharmacy, I was truly amazed to see the robotics which bring products from the storage to the counters, the virtual shelves for OTC medicines, computerized inventory management, pharmacy queuing system and the well-organized facilities and premises for dispensing, patient counseling, compounding, storage, customers' waiting area, etc. In the succeeding days, I was introduced to the basic principles and processes of the pharmacy's quality management system and the various services and programs such as the medicines "take-back" program, "green pharmacy", health and wellness programs (eg. health checks, correct asthma inhaling techniques, smoking-cessation program), home-care services, virtual chat services and internet pharmacy. I saw how the pharmacy utilized information technology in its operations and how it harnessed social media such as facebook and twitter. My entire stay at Seven Brothers Pharmacy made me realize that good pharmacy practice (GPP) and quality management are doable in a community pharmacy. To achieve GPP, a community pharmacy must have a visionary leader and the right tools to manage the change. However, managing change requires careful planning, implementation, evaluation and continuous improvement. Managing change is not just the responsibility of the leader—it is a concerted effort where everybody must work together to achieve the desired outcomes and go into the right direction.

I was privileged to spend the last weeks of my Pharmabridge training at the Division of Social Pharmacy of the Faculty of Pharmacy, University of Helsinki. During my stay at the Division, I was able to learn how pharmacy is taught in Finland and how social pharmacy research is conducted and disseminated. Together with some ERASMUS exchange students from France, Slovenia, Spain and UK, I was able to attend lectures and theme seminars in social pharmacy and visit pharmaceutical institutions such as the Pharmaceutical Care Learning Center, the Finnish Pharmacists' Association, University Pharmacy and Pharma Industry Finland. I was also given the opportunity to tour the laboratories of the Division of Pharmaceutical Technology and present a lecture on the "Practice of Pharmacy in the Philippines" to some pharmacy faculty members and students.

In my interactions with my classmates and professors at the University, I realized that there is really a need to shift pharmacy education and research from the traditional. Pharmacy students must be educated as future health care professionals and not just dispensers of medicines. Modern pharmacy education should produce graduates who can use their knowledge and skills to deliver pharmaceutical care and translate researches into meaningful practice.

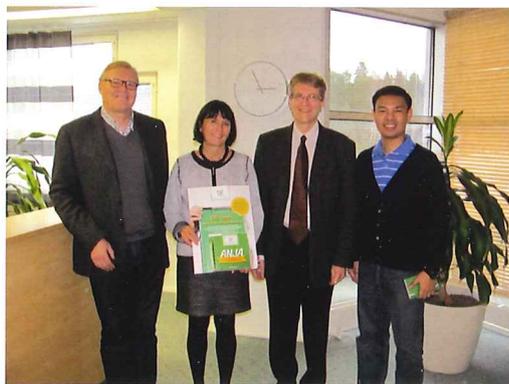
As I look back, my 4-week stay in Finland gave me a whole new perspective of pharmacy. I was able to benchmark where we are in the Philippines, observe best practices and learn from the challenges faced by Finnish pharmacists. The most important lesson that I learned from my training is that pharmacy education, research and practice must work together to effect the desired changes. No pharmacist works in isolation and there must be a strong commitment from every one to improve the profession.



at PharmaService of the Association of Finnish Pharmacies



Seven Brothers Pharmacy



with ERASMUS pharmacy student at the University of Helsinki