

Clinical Pharmacology and Therapeutics Education in Europe—undergraduate and Postgraduate Aspects

Michael Orme

Chairman, European Association for Clinical Pharmacology and Therapeutics

The undergraduate medical curriculum has been extensively modified in many countries in Europe over the last ten years and the situation in the UK is broadly representative of what has happened. We have moved away from the didactic approach to teaching with students being expected to digest and learn many facts for them to be regurgitated at examination time. The new approach puts more emphasis on learning, on problem solving (or in some schools problem based learning (PBL), more effort on giving the students communication skills and instead of assessing knowledge for its own sake we now seek to assess competences and skills. At the same time there has been a move towards a core curriculum with additional material being provided in electives or selectives in which the student has considerable choice.

This has posed some problems in Clinical Pharmacology and Therapeutics (CPT) which should be integrated in most other subject areas (eg cardiology, neurology) but often this has been ignored. Following support from the General Medical Council (GMC) in the UK there is now greater effort in the final year to make sure that graduates are competent to prescribe medicines safely and effectively. At the same time we have tried to develop a core curriculum for CPT and this has been done in two ways—either by producing a drug based curriculum in which students are expected to know in some detail about some 100 drugs which are central to an understanding of therapeutics. An alternative way which will be discussed is to develop a disease based approach and to select perhaps 67 disease states which the student is expected to know how to manage and prescribe for.

In the postgraduate situation the trained clinical pharmacologist is expected to lead the Continuing Professional Development (CPD) of all doctors as far as prescribing medicines is concerned. There is however a special need to train the next generation of clinical pharmacologists and a core curriculum is being developed for use in this group of specialist-to-be. The length of time for training is being harmonised in Europe and we have seen several countries make great strides forward in their ability to train future specialists in CPT (eg Italy, Spain, Czech Republic, Hungary etc).