

Is it possible to educate professionalism with the help of a learning portfolio?

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ABSTRACT:

Background:

Portfolios are used to provide evidence about learning and development. In healthcare professions learning portfolios are important tools for promoting reflective practice and self-education. Professional development and professionalism education are closely connected. The aim of this study was to evaluate how a learning portfolio as study method helps pharmacy students at the University of Tartu (UT), Estonia, to identify, learn and develop their professionalism.

Materials and methods:

Social pharmacy and drug safety (SPDS) I is a 6 ETCS course for 4-th year pharmacy students providing information about operation of healthcare system including pharmacy sector in Estonia and EU. All 4-th year students (n=22) filled in their learning portfolio every week and described existing and acquired knowledge, and analysed how new information contributed to their perceptions about professional roles of pharmacists. In addition students received a drawing assignment to picture competent professional in pharmacy. Content analysis was used to evaluate learning portfolio data and drawings. Questionnaire was applied to gather students' feedback about a learning portfolio as tool to educate professionalism.

Results:

A learning portfolio contributed to students' evaluation and analysis of existing and acquired knowledge about healthcare system and handling of medicines. About half of the students tended to give descriptive and not analytical assessment to acquired knowledge and its' impact to their future professional performance. Drawing assignment clarified several professional roles of pharmacists. Students favoured pictorial presentation of professionalism as it helped better understand professional competence in pharmacy. Pharmacy students considered a learning portfolio as a moderate to slightly beneficial tool for evaluation and analysis of acquired knowledge and addressing students' learning needs. However, continuous practical application of this type of data recording was considered unlikely.

Conclusions:

A learning portfolio was used first time to support professionalism education of pharmacy students at the UT. This tool presented structured information about development of students' professional knowledge. In the future, repeat use of a learning portfolio would help to understand the impact of self-reflection and self-analysis in professionalism education.