Experiencing Our ‘Products’ in Action

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Having spent the majority of my career as an academic pharmacist, each year I have seen new students coming into the system (our raw materials) and we are proud when our final year students finally graduate and enter the work place as interns (our products). This manufacturing analogy might seem a bit crude – after all, we are dealing with individuals. The fact remains that at the end of the day, we produce young professionals as our products.

Pharmacists in industry are able to see their products in the market as consumers and take pride in knowing that they had some part in producing it. Our colleagues in community pharmacy primarily sell pharmaceutical care, and they too get to experience the benefits of their efforts as their patients return each month.

As academics, however, we bid a fond farewell to our graduates and very often, never see them again. I frequently wonder how they are faring in the real world. What kind of pharmacists have they become? Have they committed to implementing the best practices we enthusiastically taught them? If all goes well, we rarely make contact with a large majority of them, but if something goes wrong, a disciplinary hearing or some form of transgression performed by one of our former students climbing the corporate ladder in ways I could never have imagined when they were sitting in the class room. Students, some of whom you would never have expected it, are now at executive level making a significant impact.

Watching students grow and mature through the relatively short four (sometimes more) years that they are enrolled at university is rewarding, but to see them excel as professionals in the work place is an experience I wish all academics could have. All too often we become fixated on how we are going to deal with the ‘raw materials’ we are working with now and forget to appreciate the products they turn into.

I would encourage pharmacists out there, whichever sector you find yourself in, to make contact with your alma mater and let them know about the pharmacist you have become. It is this feedback that continues to motivate academic pharmacists to continue with their efforts (often accompanied by great personal sacrifice) to ensure the sustainability of the profession through developing, implementing and evaluating quality training and research programmes in pharmacy.