

Éva Szökő - President, Hungarian Society for Pharmaceutical Sciences (MGYT)



[Hungarian] patients are suspicious of prescribed medicine and tend to prefer homoeopathic or natural alternatives

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Prof. Éva Szökő, president of the Hungarian Society for Pharmaceutical Sciences (MGYT), shares her insights on the activities of the society, its collaboration with institutions and industry players in the area of prevention, adherence, public health awareness, translational research, and its future outlook.

Can you introduce the key activities of the MGYT?

The society was founded by professors of the pharmaceutical faculties in 1924, as pharmaceutical sciences were mainly present in those institutions. As the society grew, it became more diverse and created special interest groups: pharmacotherapy and pharmaceutical care, herbal medicine, pharmaceutical analysis, pharmaceutical history, pharmaceutical research, pharmaceutical technology, pharmaceutical organization and administration, industrial pharmacy, hospital pharmacy, and education. Currently, there are about 2,000 members who come from the pharmaceutical faculties, pharmaceutical industry, hospital pharmacies, and from the community pharmacies. The number of clinical and hospital pharmacists have been increasing in Hungary parallel with their growing acknowledgement as a profession accompanied by better salaries. The government has launched scholarships for young graduates to enhance this trend and help them to gain their first practical experience. Additionally, pharmacists can increasingly work bedside with

patients, provide consultation about pharmacotherapy, assess the possible drug interactions and advice on their avoidance.

We collaborate with the Hungarian Chamber of Pharmacists (MGYK) regularly and recently started an adherence program in pharmacies. In that framework, the electronic health data system launched recently can be exploited as a method to track medication adherence of the patients. This is particularly helpful for patients that suffer from chronic diseases. The two main areas of our focus are chronic pulmonary diseases (COPD, asthma bronchiale) and cardiovascular diseases. Respiratory diseases are frequent and problematic, which are associated with high rates of smoking and a lack of proper health literacy. Therefore, MGYT launched a collaboration with MGYK and the Hungarian Respiratory Society to find means to improve this situation and the role pharmacists should play. The other area is the statin therapy of patients with cardiovascular diseases was launched to help educate patients about the expected gains, proper drug usage and length of therapy. There is an attempt to standardize practices across the country, as there is still a lack of harmonization with all pharmacies in this respect.

How did the new prescription pharmaceutical packaging identification system affect the members of MGYT?

Mitigating the problems arising from the introduction of this new regulation was mainly the focus of the Chamber of Pharmacists, the manufacturers, etc. However, MGYT helped by suggestions after starting the e-prescription (part of the electronic system containing also health data of patients) how to improve the conditions of its use as it could affect patients' access to medicine, especially for those who are unable to go to the pharmacies personally: tertiary authorization was a topic that needed to be addressed.

How is society involved to improve prevention and health awareness in the country?

MGYT has launched a pilot program using a myriad of distribution channels to communicate with patients in a more effective way: leaflets, e-blasting, and improved website. These are aimed at enhancing the drug and health literacy and to increase the transparency of drug treatments, therapy durations, and active components. Also, a registration initiative was started to collect more data on prescribed medication but also to monitor what advice and recommendations were given to the patients. The society is involved in organising conferences, symposiums, and school

visitations to holistically enhance prevention methods and health awareness. Secondary school visitations are organised to make the younger generation more knowledgeable about the products and services pharmacies provide. Vaccinations, proper medicine use for non-prescription and prescription drugs, advantages and risks associated with them, therapy durations, antibiotics are some of the topics that are discussed in those visitations. Additionally, in these visits, we encourage them to visit pharmacies if they have any health concerns.

How is medicine perceived in Hungary?

There is scepticism associated with western medicine, which is an endemic problem. Patients are suspicious of prescribed medicine and tend to prefer homoeopathic or natural alternatives. Plant extracts are frequently perceived as being safer than a conventional pill. However, these are not effective for more serious diseases, and even have risks of their own. Over-use or mal-usage are just as dangerous as with conventional medicine. These are social issues that can be changed with promoting education and health awareness, however, it is a lengthy process.

How does MGYT collaborate in promoting new research results for industrial and practical applications?

Our special interest groups organize their annual conferences discussing hot topics of the fields. There are half-day meetings with invited speakers, as well. The new research results can be published in our quarterly open-access journal entitled "Acta Pharmaceutica Hungarica". Until now, it has been published only in Hungarian and now in English starting from this year (<https://www.ap-hsps.hu/>). Additionally, we have a monthly publication that is dedicated to pharmaceutical practices aimed at hospital and community pharmacists. It also informs them about novel therapies and the newest development in everyday practices. We offer lots of training for community pharmacists and provide e-learning courses on our website for their life-long learning.

Does MGYT collaborate with the industry?

One of the activities of the society is to help the interests of the pharmaceutical sector come to fruition. Therefore, we disseminate new results, their development, their work, and events that

affect pharmaceutical companies.

The industry is also the main sponsors for conferences and the competitions that MGYT organizes. There is a forum organized for PhD students and young researchers to present their results and the best lectures are awarded. This can be also a starting point for the careers of the participants if their results are enticing to companies. Besides the contest for young researchers, there is a contest every year for hospital and community pharmacists with about 20-25 lecturers, where they identify a practical problem and present their solution.

MGYT members collaborate as well in the field of drug development with the industry. In this area, drug repositioning, active ingredients and development of new formulations are the focus. We also offer a training course on novelty in drug research.

What is MGYT hoping to achieve after the two-day congress next April?

It is a big anniversary for the society as it will be celebrating 96 years of existence. Besides presenting new research results and having valuable discussions, the goal would be to motivate community pharmacists to be more engaged and interested in the latest development in the field. This occasion is also used to spread information and address topics that help develop pharmacies. Industrial manufacturing, drug and patient safety, adherence programs, big data, digital health and quality assurance are e.g. subjects that will be discussed. This year in the program the topic of the pharmaceutical curriculum and the need for reform will be covered. This is important as the curriculum has to adapt to the needs of the students and take into consideration new labour force requirements. This would also increase the competitiveness and the appeal of this field of study.

What would be your final message?

MGYT is involved in the European Federation of Pharmaceutical Sciences and I am currently a member of the Executive Committee. In 2005, inspired from this collaboration, Hungary was one of the founders of the Balaton-Baltic-Bosphorous-Bled (BBBB) cooperation with every other year conferences organized in one of the countries (Hungary, Estonia, Finland, Turkey, Slovenia). The goal is to strengthen regional collaborations in pharmaceutical sciences and create strategic partnerships. More collaborations, scientific networks within the European Federation exist. These can offer new opportunities and make Hungary a more prominent player in the field of pharmaceutical studies.

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