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Reflective Portfolio as an Educational Tool for Professional Development of Pharmacy Students

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Introduction: Reflective portfolio is an evidence of the insights and experiences that a student has gained during the course of study. The objective of this study was to evaluate the perception of pharmacy students on the effectiveness of reflective portfolio in promoting professional development.

Method: Reflective portfolio has been introduced to the pharmacy students from their first year of study at the International Medical University, Malaysia. Students are to self-assess their competencies in the identified domains at the end of every semester and submit reflective essays supported with appropriate learning evidences through an electronic platform. It is formatively assessed by the mentors, who will provide written feedback.

In this study, one-to-one semi-structured interviews were conducted among the Year 4 students to evaluate their perception on reflective portfolio. The interviews were recorded with the consent of the participants and transcribed verbatim. A thematic analysis approach was used to identify the factors associated with their experience.

Findings: Students with positive perception appreciated the educational value of reflective portfolio in promoting professional development. Five themes have been identified to be associated with their experience, i.e. objective and guideline, development of personal and professional skills, learning attitude, mentor's feedback, technical accessibility. Students perceived useful feedback as one that helped them to identify areas of improvement as well as strategies. The findings suggest that continuous faculty training for assessing reflective writing and giving effective feedback is essential.

Conclusion: Reflective portfolio is useful for promoting the professional development of pharmacy students. Clear understanding of objectives and guidelines, useful mentor's feedback, positive learning attitude and motivation, and a user friendly technology platform for submission of reflective portfolio have been identified to be the factors contributing to positive experience with reflective portfolio.