

# A Pharmacy Student's Journey into Global Health

*This is a guest blog by Oumaima El Mimouni, a pharmacy student from the Netherlands with a unique perspective shaped by her Moroccan heritage. She shares her thoughts on the role of pharmacists in shaping global health.*

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Growing up, I witnessed firsthand the stark differences in healthcare access and quality between my two cultural backgrounds. This experience ignited a passion in me to explore the vital role pharmacists can play in addressing inequity in global health and its challenges.

## **The Role of Pharmacists**

When you think of a pharmacist, you probably picture someone at your local pharmacy, ready to help you without needing an appointment. Pharmacists are typically seen as local healthcare providers, focused on local patients and local issues. But what if I told you that pharmacists have the skills to make a difference on a global scale?

## **My Background and Perspective**

As a pharmacy student in the Netherlands, I haven't really been exposed to global health issues within my studies. The curriculum is very much focused on the Dutch context. However, as my roots lie in Morocco, where my parents were born, I have personally seen access to healthcare from a different perspective. Visiting my family there every year has opened my eyes to how different healthcare can be. As I progressed in my studies, I became more and more aware of the differences in healthcare between Morocco and the Netherlands. For example, in Morocco, patients often experience long waiting times at the physician's office; sometimes spending an entire day without being seen. Antibiotics are easily bought 'over the counter', without regulation. Financial or transport barriers prevent many from receiving proper medical care altogether. This has made me realise that the idea of 'basic healthcare' is not universal. What qualifies as basic care in the Netherlands remains out of reach for many people around the world. Through witnessing these healthcare disparities, I've come to understand that pharmacists have both a responsibility and an opportunity to contribute to global health.

## **Exploring Global Health**

Since Morocco is classified as a lower-middle-income country by the Organization

for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), I began to wonder: how do healthcare systems function in countries with fewer resources? To better understand global health and its current challenges, I started an internship at Health Action International (HAI) in April.

During my internship at HAI, I have been focusing on two key issues:

1. The impact of recent cuts to development aid on sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) in low- and middle-income countries.
2. The role of an educational comic book in teaching children about snakebite prevention.

Through these two very different topics, I have learnt a lot about the complexity and current challenges facing global health. Just a few weeks ago, I did not even know about aid cuts, let alone about the impact this will have on access to healthcare. I also had no idea how many children suffer from [snakebites](#) every year, often with devastating consequences. Learning about these issues has been eye-opening, showing me the urgent healthcare challenges that exist beyond the scope of my formal studies. Learning from the work of the HAI team and diving into a range of resources, I have also been thinking more about how pharmacists, and more specifically I, can play a role in global health. My experience at HAI has inspired me and broadened my perspective on healthcare. It has made me realise that, despite some issues we face in the Netherlands, we are significantly better off than many other countries. The difficulties faced by these nations highlight how essential pharmaceutical expertise is in ensuring access to quality healthcare.

### **The Potential of Pharmacists**

I truly believe that pharmacists, including those in the Netherlands, can have a positive impact on global health issues. Pharmacy is not just about local healthcare; it plays a great role in tackling global health challenges and pharmacists are able to use their expertise to drive change. Take the distribution of falsified medicines for example, where currently, it is estimated that [20% of the medicines circulating in Africa](#) are substandard or falsified. Then there is the growing threat of antimicrobial resistance, the urgent need for stronger medicine supply chains, and humanitarian healthcare and policy making. These are all areas where pharmacists can step up and be part of the solution. By embracing a more global perspective, pharmacists can contribute to solutions that improve healthcare systems and patient outcomes far beyond their own communities. Unfortunately, the current pharmacy curriculum in the Netherlands doesn't really address these global health issues. As a consequence, most pharmacists often lack knowledge of global health and related issues to tackle these challenges.

I believe that there should be more focus on public and global health within the curriculum, so future pharmacists understand better how patients fit into broader populations, recognise healthcare disparities and gain a clearer view of the bigger

(global) picture. Ultimately, this will not only make them better pharmacists, but it will also empower them contribute to more effective, equitable healthcare, both locally and globally.

### **A Call to Action for Future Pharmacists**

If I could share one message with fellow pharmacy students and pharmacists, it would be this: Step outside your bubble. Pharmacy is about ensuring safe, effective, and accessible healthcare, which is not just a local but also a global concern.

The reality is that pharmaceutical systems vary widely across countries, and many communities encounter challenges that Dutch pharmacists rarely face. Limited access to essential medicines, antimicrobial resistance and substandard- and falsified medicines in the Global South shape patient outcomes in ways we might not consider in our daily work.

Recognising these global differences and challenges is not just interesting, it is essential. It makes pharmacists better, more informed healthcare providers. That is why I encourage fellow pharmacy students to seek [internships](#) with civil society organisations, engage with global health issues, and get to know the realities of healthcare in different countries. These experiences will not only strengthen our professional skills, but they will change the way we view pharmacy altogether.

A pharmacist with global health awareness is more than a medicines expert. They become a healthcare provider who understands disparities, helps bridge global health gaps, can influence policies, and improve patient outcomes on a larger scale.

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*By Oumaima El Mimouni, Pharmacy Student*