

**The Impact of White Coat Ceremonies on Professional Socialization:
A Survey of U.S. Schools of Pharmacy**

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Abstract

Pharmacy and medical schools share mutual concerns regarding the need to place greater emphasis on professional socialization. Academic institutions within both professions have begun to establish white coat ceremonies to initiate the process of inculcating professional values. While planning a ceremony at Palm Beach Atlantic University School of Pharmacy, a literature search revealed little published information on pharmacy white coat ceremonies. To clarify the status of such rituals, a survey was sent to the 83 accredited schools of pharmacy in the United States. The 25-question survey solicited details about the nature of each school's ceremony. Results as of May, 2002, indicated that 52 of the 83 schools conduct a white coat ceremony. Responses demonstrated a commonality of features among the ceremonies at different schools. The white coat ceremony is a growing phenomenon in pharmacy education that represents a vital step in the quest to inspire attitudes of humanism and professionalism.

INTRODUCTION – THE CHALLENGE OF PROFESSIONAL SOCIALIZATION

The 1991 report of the AACP Argus Commission highlighted that many pharmacists lack pride in their profession and do not hold their professional self-worth in high regard (1). The Commission further stated that pharmacy educators bear a responsibility to instill in students a clear sense of the profession's societal purpose and to encourage each student to develop a personal practice philosophy. Its findings launched a new era in pharmacy education in which the dynamics of professional socialization are receiving greater attention. In 2000, the White Paper on Pharmacy Student Professionalism culminated a 5-year effort by the APhA Academy of Students of Pharmacy—AACP Council of Deans Task Force on Professionalism (2). The participants concluded that pharmacy must recommit itself to enhancing the professional development of pharmacy students. The final report of the task force states, "A combination of factors in both pharmaceutical education and pharmacy practice serves to create inconsistent professional socialization throughout the pharmacy education process. This inconsistent socialization threatens the status of pharmacy as a profession and justifies immediate action on the part of pharmacy students, educators, and practicing pharmacists."

The issue is not new. Manasse and colleagues first described the challenge of inconsistent socialization of pharmacy students in 1975 (3). In the same year, a study at the University of Rhode Island College of Pharmacy found that student attitudes toward the profession of pharmacy became more negative as they progressed through school (4). Feelings of cynicism, disillusionment and disenchantment were more prevalent as students approached the final year of the program. Those results were corroborated by another study conducted during the 1980's, which showed that students' sense of calling to the pharmacy profession declined in linear fashion during every year of the curriculum, as well as the first year following graduation (5). Today, students deal with the same dilemma of rationalizing the stark contrast between the highly professional pharmaceutical care model that they learn in school and the technical, distributive practice model that they often encounter in the workplace. Their professional values tend to erode upon exposure to product-oriented practice sites that do not reinforce the importance of a strong commitment to patient care and service excellence.

Professionalism Challenges in Medical Schools

It is interesting to note that pharmacy is not alone in facing the challenge of effectively socializing health professional trainees. Medical students, just as their pharmacy counterparts, face a multitude of

economic pressures and ethical dilemmas that confound their professional growth. As a result, medical schools have recognized the need to place greater emphasis on the development of professionalism and professional values (6).

The Medical Professionalism Project was launched in 1999 as a joint undertaking of the American College of Physicians, the American Society of Internal Medicine, the European Federation of Internal Medicine, and the American Board of Internal Medicine (7). Representatives of those medical societies came together amid mutual concerns that medicine's commitment to the patient is being challenged by external forces of change. Their collaboration resulted in the development of a new charter on medical professionalism. The summary of that charter includes the statement, "To maintain the fidelity of medicine's social contract during this turbulent time, we believe that physicians must reaffirm their active dedication to principles of professionalism, which entails not only their personal commitment to the welfare of their patients but also collective efforts to improve the health-care system for the welfare of society" (7).

The White Coat Ceremony as a Partial Solution

Although there is no universally-accepted definition of professionalism, thorough descriptions of that which constitutes professional behavior have been compiled (6,8). It appears that students of both medicine and pharmacy are finding it increasingly difficult to adhere to such basic professional values as subordinating their own interests to those of patients being served, maintaining high ethical standards, dedicating themselves to excellence and lifelong learning, being responsive to societal needs, and manifesting sincere compassion in their work. Of course, the difficulty confronting academicians is not defining professionalism, but inculcating such values in students who are constantly being influenced by conflicting ideologies. An undertaking of such broad scope needs a focal point that embodies the essence of the mission. During the last several years, many medical schools and pharmacy schools have established a white coat ceremony to serve as the focus of their efforts to promote professionalism.

This article highlights the recent development of the white coat ceremony as a stimulus of professional growth, explores arguments both for and against it, and presents the results of a comprehensive survey of current white coat ceremony practices among U.S. schools of pharmacy. The most common features of white coat ceremonies are also described.

ORIGINS OF THE WHITE COAT CEREMONY IN MEDICAL EDUCATION

Dating back to the days of Norman Rockwell, four symbols have been used to depict the physician: a white coat, stethoscope, head mirror and black bag (9). Of these, the white coat is most often identified as representing the social concept of what it means to be a physician (9). Although there is much conjecture about the significance of the physician's coat being white, and whether the color stands for a specific concept, such as purity, life, cleanliness or science, no one really knows for sure (10). In recent years the white coat has taken on a new meaning that is easier to understand. It stands for practicing medicine with altruism and a sense of duty, treating the sick with compassion, and selflessly serving the needs of patients (10,11). The white coat is not magical, but it conveys a powerful humanistic message when presented in the proper context, one that engenders trust in the competencies and intentions of those who wear it.

The Humanistic Impetus Behind the White Coat Ceremony Movement

Over 100 U.S. medical schools currently conduct some form of white coat ceremony to codify the professional values espoused by the school (12). The recent surge in popularity of such "rites of passage" only dates back to 1993, when the Arnold P. Gold Foundation sponsored the first white coat ceremony at the Columbia University College of Physicians and Surgeons (13). The foundation was established by a pediatric neurologist, Arnold P. Gold, and his wife Sandra, in 1988 (14). Their purpose in promoting white coat ceremonies is to alert beginning medical students of the need to balance excellence in science with humanistic patient care. The foundation offers one-time grants of up to \$5,000 to medical schools wishing to establish an annual white coat ceremony (15). Detailed guidelines on how to conduct all aspects of the ceremony are also provided. The Gold Foundation recommends that the following six components be included as part of a white coat ceremony (15).

1. Family and friends of students are invited to attend the ceremony.
2. Students are welcomed at the ceremony by respected leaders (dean, president, etc.)
3. Students hear an inspiring address by a professional role model.
4. Each student is physically "cloaked" with his/her first white coat.
5. Students pledge an oath in front of peers, guests and dignitaries.
6. A reception is held to celebrate the students' new professional status.
- 7.

Criticisms of White Coat Ceremonies in Medicine

The value of white coat ceremonies has generally been applauded in medical circles, and even a few staunch skeptics have been persuaded to support the concept (16). It would seem that such a wholesome event, based on altruistic ideals, would spark little objection. Yet some opponents of the white coat ceremony have voiced concern. Three such critiques have been published, each enumerating specific objections (12,17,18). One author raised questions as to whether the white coat ceremony is the best vehicle through which to promote humble and compassionate caregiving (17). She pointed out that the white coat has additional meanings beyond the altruistic symbolism espoused during a ceremony, including undertones of a “hidden curriculum” that promotes hierarchies and elitism in medical practice. It was further suggested to replace the white coat ceremony with new rituals, such as service learning activities in the community.

Another critic pointed out that students are asked to pledge themselves to a specific oath, despite the implausibility that all students would be able to subscribe sincerely to any single code or oath (18). He went on to suggest that code recitation has little meaning to students who have not yet received sufficient training to fully comprehend the implications of the oath’s content, and hypothesized that the “bonding process,” which is intended to unite participants of the ceremony in a mutual commitment, paradoxically serves to alienate them from the patients who they will one day be expected to serve.

The final critique contends that the white coat ceremony is really an attempt to turn professional trust, which must be earned by each individual practitioner, into a group entitlement (12). In reference to the trust-based authority that is granted to physicians by the patients they serve, this critic stated, “A ceremony that obscures or otherwise confuses this authority cannot, ultimately, be conducive to maintaining it (12).”

THE PALM BEACH ATLANTIC WHITE COAT CEREMONY EXPERIENCE

Despite the aforementioned concerns about white coat ceremonies, the School of Pharmacy at Palm Beach Atlantic University decided to conduct its inaugural ceremony on January 19, 2002, feeling that the anticipated benefits far outweighed any potential detriment to their students’ professional growth. The school, which enrolled its first class just five months earlier, was founded on a firm set of humanistic values, including servant-leadership, the compassionate delivery of healthcare, professional excellence,

lifelong learning, and faith-based personal development. The principles behind a white coat ceremony seemed closely aligned with the mission of the pharmacy school, which can best be described as, “pharmacy with faith.” Palm Beach Atlantic is a Christian institution and the school of pharmacy is characterized by frequent prayer in both classroom sessions and meetings. In keeping with the tradition of Judeo-Christian principles that are openly practiced at the university, the faculty of the school of pharmacy determined that the white coat ceremony should take on added significance by including a spiritual component. This involved having the students pledge themselves to a professional covenant that expresses a commitment to humbly serve society as health professionals according to God’s plan (Appendix A). Hence, despite being a white coat ceremony in the traditional sense, the name of the ritual was changed to “Professional Covenant Ceremony.”

The ceremony was held on a Saturday night, commencing at 6:00 PM. The timing in January coincided with the start of the students’ first introductory practice experience. Despite having only 52 students in the first-year class, about 250 people were in attendance, mostly family and friends of the students. With piano accompaniment, the students solemnly filed into the room, followed by faculty dressed in full regalia. All members of the pharmacy faculty were in attendance, as well as the president and provost of the university. After an invocation by a faculty member and welcoming addresses by the president and pharmacy dean, the dean led the class in reciting the Oath of a Pharmacist (Appendix B). The provost then led the class in prayerful recitation of the Palm Beach Atlantic Professional Covenant (Appendix A).

During the program, an outstanding pharmacist practitioner delivered a keynote address to the students, inspiring them to live up to the ideals expressed in their oath and covenant. Each student was then called up individually by the dean and “cloaked” by the associate dean with a new white coat, complete with a patch containing the school insignia sewn on the left shoulder, the student’s name embroidered above the pocket, and a university name tag. After donning their coats, students were personally congratulated by the president, provost, dean, associate dean, and all faculty.

Immediately after conclusion of the ceremony, the students posed together for a group photograph (Figure 1), and all in attendance joined in celebration at a reception. The pride and emotion exhibited by students and their families was palpable. It was also a moving experience for the faculty in attendance. Though it is far too early to assess the long-term impact of the ceremony on the professional

growth of the students, there is little doubt that for one night they were proud to be students of pharmacy, their loved ones were proud of them, and those wearing regalia were proud to be educators.

The total expense for all aspects of the professional covenant ceremony, including invitations and mailings, white coats, music, photography, food and beverages, was about \$6,000. The cost was covered by generous donations from pharmacy corporations.

A SURVEY: THE STATUS OF WHITE COAT CEREMONIES IN PHARMACY

While preparing for the professional covenant ceremony at Palm Beach Atlantic, anecdotal reports surfaced about other schools that had already initiated a ceremony or were preparing to conduct their first. However, a review of pharmacy literature revealed a paucity of published literature on the subject. It was decided to conduct a national survey to accurately determine the status of white coat ceremonies in U.S. schools of pharmacy.

Survey Methods

A 25-question survey was developed for distribution to all accredited schools of pharmacy in the United States. The first four questions assessed whether the school had either conducted a ceremony or had plans to initiate one, and if not, the school was asked to identify the primary reasons against it. The remaining questions were answered only by schools already conducting white coat ceremonies, to ascertain the unique features and characteristics of each school's ceremony. The questions elicited information about when ceremonies were held, who attended, how the coats and other expenses were funded, and what took place during ceremonies.

In April, 2002, the survey was sent via e-mail to the deans of all 83 accredited schools of pharmacy using an e-mail list provided by AACP. Each school was able to respond in two ways, either by completing the form directly at a web site (with a link that was attached to the original e-mail), or by printing a hard copy of the form, filling it out by hand, and FAXing the completed form. A second e-mail was sent out approximately two weeks later to deans whose schools had not responded. Telephone follow-up was subsequently used to obtain basic (yes or no) information from schools that did not complete the survey or to clarify specific information contained in a completed survey.

Response Rate of the Survey

A total of 80 (96%) of pharmacy schools responded to the survey. The three schools that did not initially respond were contacted by telephone and queried as to whether they conduct a white coat ceremony, but those schools did not submit completed surveys. Some respondents did not answer every question or failed to provide detail when specifically prompted to do so. For any instances of incomplete data, the calculated percentages listed in this report are based on the number of schools that provided a response.

Prevalence of White Coat Ceremonies

As of May, 2002, 52 of the 83 schools of pharmacy (63%) reported conducting a white coat ceremony (Table I). Another 10 schools (12%) had already made the decision to implement their first ceremony (Table II), and 7 (8%) were considering the issue but had not yet made a final decision. Only three schools reported that they had considered conducting a white coat ceremony and decided against it. One of those schools conducts a professional induction ceremony, but does not provide a white coat as part of the event.

The University of Kentucky was the first pharmacy school to start the tradition of a white coat ceremony, dating back to 1995. The recency of the phenomenon can be further illustrated by the fact that 29 of the 52 schools currently engaging in white coat ceremonies did not initiate the event until 2000 or later, with 10 more scheduled to join the ranks in the near future (Figure 2).

When White Coat Ceremonies Are Held

Twenty eight schools hold the white coat ceremony immediately prior to beginning the professional curriculum, and another 17 hold it sometime during the first professional year. Only four schools conduct the ceremony during the third professional year.

White coat ceremonies at schools of pharmacy are held every day of the week. Sunday is the most common day for a ceremony, accounting for about two-thirds of the schools. Friday is the second most common, with the other five days of the week each utilized by a handful of schools. Almost all of the schools begin their ceremonies in the late morning or early afternoon; only seven schools reported a ceremony start time of 5:00 PM or later.

Typical Features of White Coat Ceremonies

The following components of a white coat ceremony were reported by at least half of the schools that conduct ceremonies: students receive a white coat (40 schools); students recite an oath (40 schools);

invited guest gives keynote address (35 schools); students have a photograph taken (26 schools); a reception follows the ceremony (37 schools). Twenty four schools have students recite the 1994 APhA version of "Oath of a Pharmacist" (Appendix B), while 16 schools use a different oath or pledge. Some schools allow the students to develop their own professional oath.

Other features that were reported by at least one-fourth of the schools include musical accompaniment during the ceremony, a student representative gives a speech, and students receive a pin or some other symbol. A few schools identified additional features that were not commonly reported, such as having students sign the oath, combining the ceremony with an honors convocation, conducting an open house, and presenting students with name tags.

Participants and Guests in Attendance

Thirty three schools permit students to invite as many guests as they wish, six schools reported limiting the number of guests, and eight do not allow guests to attend the ceremony. Just over half of the schools that invite guests do so by sending out personal invitations. Faculty attendance varies widely between institutions. Of the 49 schools that provided information, 10 reported a faculty turnout of 90% or greater. Roughly half of the schools have found faculty attendance to be at least 50%.

Almost all of the schools reported that the dean and associate dean participate directly in the ceremony, and approximately half also involve the director of experiential education and/or the chair of pharmacy practice. Only about 10% of the schools that conduct ceremonies involve the president and/or provost of the college or university. Others who have been reported to participate include alumni association members, preceptors, advisors/assigned mentors, health-system administrators, corporate sponsors, student body presidents, and state board of pharmacy or state association leaders.

In most cases, the person responsible for planning the event is a dean, associate dean or assistant dean. In some cases, however, the ceremony is planned by an executive secretary/assistant, experiential coordinator/director, director of student services, or class representative.

The White Coat

Of the 40 schools that reported giving students a white coat during the ceremony, 29 provide the coat with a patch or emblem containing the insignia of the school of pharmacy. Just over half of the schools locate the patch above a breast pocket, with the remainder positioning the patch on the upper

sleeve. A few schools place the patch on the right side of the coat, but the vast majority of patches are located on the left side. Four schools also embroider student names on the coat.

Ceremony Funding and Sponsorship

Schools were asked to estimate itemized expenses related to the ceremony on an aggregate basis, rather than per student. The survey yielded a wide range of costs among the 39 schools that reported a total estimate. Six held the cost of the event under \$1,000, another 22 schools reported expenses of no more than \$3,750, and eight schools found the cost to be in the range of \$4,000 to \$6,500. Of the remaining three schools, two incurred costs of \$8,000 and the highest total turned out to be \$14,000. The two major sources of expense were the white coats and the reception. Other sources of incidental expenses were printing of programs and invitations, photography, flowers, patches, pins, name tags, music, framing of oaths or certificates, custodial services, and pressing the coats.

Twelve schools stated that students are expected to pay for their own white coats; 36 schools provide the coats at no charge. The primary source of funding was reported to be corporate donations (26 schools), whereas 19 institutions fund the ceremony from the operating budget of the school. Three schools fund the event through student fees, two stated that the alumni association pays for the ceremony, and one has the alumni association purchase the white coats.

Feedback From Attendees

Thirty-eight of the 44 respondents (86%) who answered the question about feedback from attendees indicated that those in attendance expressed enthusiastic approval of the ceremony. Five schools (11%) reported moderate approval, and 1 school had not received appreciable feedback. None of the 44 respondents reported negative or mixed feedback about the ceremony. Of the 43 schools that responded to the question about the future of their white coat ceremony, 38 (88%) indicated that the ceremony will continue, while 5 schools (12%) plan to discontinue the ceremony. Reasons for discontinuation were not provided.

DISCUSSION: ASSESSING THE VALUE OF WHITE COAT CEREMONIES

Evaluating the effectiveness of a white coat ceremony as a stimulus of professionalism is a highly subjective process. It is an outcome that is almost impossible to measure in scientific terms or to analyze statistically. When judging the white coat ceremony as an educational tool, one must rely heavily on

intuition, albeit as objectively as possible. It is difficult to quantify a student's motivation, commitment, enthusiasm, or compassion, but the outward behaviors that result from such affective traits can be observed. Unfortunately, by the time a student's professional behavior can be adequately assessed, the white coat ceremony is but a distant memory. Therefore, the efficacy of the ceremony cannot be evaluated on its own merit; it must be viewed as part of a complex set of educational strategies. And if the faculty responsible for executing those strategies intuitively feel that the white coat ceremony has somehow stimulated professional growth, then the ceremony's purpose has probably been fulfilled.

Effectiveness of the Survey Tool

The survey provided reasonably complete data describing the demographics of white coat ceremonies in pharmacy. The response rate was nearly 100%, though in some cases specific detail was not provided by respondents, and therefore, some of the calculated percentages could be misleading.

One weakness of the survey involved schools that indicated plans to discontinue the ceremony, which were not prompted to provide an explanation. Though only five schools fell into this category, their reasons for discontinuing the event would have been of interest. Another topic that could have been explored more fully was faculty participation. Schools were asked to report faculty attendance as a singular percentage, without distinguishing between various faculty categories, such as on-campus, off-site, full-time, part-time, didactic or experiential.

Despite the weaknesses of the measurement tool, the survey responses and descriptive accounts should provide useful information for schools weighing the advantages and disadvantages of establishing a white coat ceremony. This information might also be of assistance to schools engaged in planning or modifying the format of a ceremony.

Implications of the Survey Results

By the end of 2002, 75% of the schools of pharmacy in this country will conduct an annual white coat ceremony. This is a surprisingly high prevalence considering that such ceremonies originated in pharmacy just seven years ago. There appears to be a commonality of features between the white coat ceremonies at various schools. The formula being promoted by the Arnold P. Gold Foundation is quite popular in pharmacy, as well as medicine (Table III). The standard components of the ceremony imply that it is conducted as a solemn ritual, meant to deeply touch those who participate. Each of these

common features contributes in a unique way to the humanistic message that students should take away from the experience.

Invited guests: It is important that students pledge their commitment to a professional oath in front of the people who are most important in their lives. **Faculty in attendance:** It is also critical to include those who have been entrusted with the responsibility of guiding the students through pharmacy school. **School leaders present:** The presence of academic leaders at the ceremony emphasizes the importance of the ritual and affirms the validity of its message. **A keynote speaker:** Since professionalism can be difficult to conceptualize, inspiring words from a role model who epitomizes the best qualities of a professional can guide students to a better understanding of the oath to which they have committed themselves. **A photo:** A group photograph records the event for posterity and illustrates that the pledge was made in unity with colleagues. **A symbol:** Whatever object a school chooses to award, whether it be a white coat, blazer, pin or plaque, a memorable symbol of professionalism provides the student with a tangible reminder of the commitment made and the expectations that go along with it. **A reception:** Enabling students to socialize with faculty and guests after the ceremony provides reinforcement that it is a special occasion and a significant milestone in their education.

Response to White Coat Ceremony Critics

Thoughtful criticisms have been put forth that question both the suitability of the white coat as a health profession symbol and the use of a professional oath to codify a student's commitment to professionalism. One critic has pointed out that a white coat symbolizes medical elitism and represents a "hidden curriculum" that tends to distance physicians from their patients (17). Although the meaning behind a white coat can be construed in that manner, it can also be defined by the humanistic values put forth by the Arnold P. Gold Foundation (15). Since the white coat is a widely accepted symbol of medical (and pharmacy) practice, perhaps the time has come to further clarify the significance of the garment as representing a new type of health care practice—one clearly predicated on meeting the needs of the patient from a humanistic perspective.

One critic is to be commended for suggesting sound alternatives to white coat ceremonies, each of which is designed to promote compassionate professionalism (17). However, students might be better served if her suggestions were designed to augment, rather than replace the ceremony. A white coat ceremony, by itself, is not going to impact a student's professional growth to the extent needed.

However, when executed as one part of a systematic plan to facilitate professional development, the white coat ceremony can serve a useful purpose. The approach of building a supplemental educational experience around the foundation of a white coat ceremony has been successfully attempted (19).

Another major argument against the white coat ceremony is that students are not ready to commit to an oath that they cannot fully appreciate at such an early stage of their training (16). Students are probably not cognizant of the scope of challenges that they will eventually face when trying to live up to a professional oath. But professional oaths and pledges generally avoid specific details in favor of basic, widely-accepted values. It is both reasonable and desirable to have students commit themselves to professional lives of compassion, service, honesty, and lifelong learning. Furthermore, having students make such commitments early in the program not only directs a student's individual growth, but also guides faculty to establish educational goals and objectives that are consistent with the oath. Palm Beach Atlantic University chose to include a prayerful covenant, in addition to the "Oath of a Pharmacist," to further impress upon students the school's vision of pharmacy practice that is founded in faith and characterized by servant-leadership—as illustrated in the Bible. Even if students cannot fully commit themselves to these values at the time of the ceremony, the PBA Professional Covenant (Appendix A) clearly articulates the expectations to which they should aspire. Thus, a white coat ceremony sets a target at which students can aim as they develop personally and professionally.

An additional criticism of the medical white coat ceremony suggests that it instills a sense of entitlement to trust and respect, and might thus cause the student to believe that such trust does not need to be earned through compassionate care-giving (12). This seems to be a rather shortsighted view. It is true that an individual student could come away from the ceremony with such an elitist attitude. However, this criticism overlooks the fact that white coat ceremonies overwhelmingly promote humanistic values that elevate a patient's well-being to the highest priority. If a handful of students misinterpret that message, and instead view themselves as superior to their patients by virtue of the authority and power symbolized by their white coats, the cause of such self-centered thinking can hardly be attributed to participation in a ceremony. The intent behind the white coat ceremony is sound and justified, and its overall benefits are not lost if a few misguided students fail to get the message.

The Influence of White Coat Ceremonies on Academia

White coat ceremonies are already quite popular among pharmacy schools, and the popularity continues to rise. Based on such dramatic growth over the past few years, one can only assume that there must be something to it. It is also interesting to note that the trend in popularity of white coat ceremonies has followed remarkably parallel tracks in pharmacy and medicine.

Professionalism cannot be taught. It must be nurtured over time. Students will be influenced more by the behavior of their teachers than by the words they speak. In this regard, all faculty serve as role models, and their actions either reinforce or retard the maturation of students' professional values. In the words of B.F. Skinner, "People learn what you teach them, not what you intend to teach them." Faculty must be on guard to function as beacons of light to illuminate attitudes of service, compassion and excellence. The white coat ceremony affords faculty a significant opportunity to tangibly demonstrate their support for such ideals. The message needs to be conveyed consistently and convincingly, at all times, in all places, and under all circumstances—and the white coat ceremony is an excellent place to start.

The professionalism challenge facing pharmacy educators is clear (20). If students encounter a constant humanistic message from teachers in every venue, both didactic and experiential, that the application of knowledge in service to others is more important than the demonstration of knowledge on an exam, they might begin to see their profession in an inspiring new light. It is up to the faculty at each school, based on the unique mission and vision of the institution, to determine their own strategies for promoting professional growth among their students. Whether by prayer, oath, pledge, or covenant, the ultimate objective is to provide a spark of motivation that will inspire each student to achieve his/her optimum potential as a pharmacist. The white coat ceremony has demonstrated itself to be a viable educational tool that is logistically manageable, economically feasible, and capable of striking a humanistic chord in both students and faculty.

CONCLUSION: ONE SMALL STEP FOR STUDENTS, ONE GIANT LEAP FOR ACADEMIA

Pharmacy has previously been described as a profession in search of professionalism (21). Greater attention will be paid to the challenges of professional socialization in coming years, from both academic institutions and pharmacy organizations. The need for expanded study and discourse on this topic is unequivocal. Any solutions that emerge are likely to be multifaceted and complex, and will warrant the

use of metaphors, symbols, and rituals to help educators and students grasp the enormity of the task at hand.

The white coat ceremony reflects a sound, albeit lofty educational goal. Knowledge cannot stand alone as a credible academic misison when it comes to training service professionals. The performance of a health care provider depends on having the will to apply one's knowledge in service to those in need. As penned by Joubert in 1842, "Education does not consist merely in adorning the memory and enlightening the understanding. Its main business should be to direct the will." Inconsistent professional socialization is to be expected if educators fail to inspire in students the will to become humanistic servant-leaders.

The white coat ceremony has the potential to serve as the crucial first step on the road to professionalism—for both pharmacy students and medical students. It is a small step, but it is a beginning, and pharmacy would be well advised to nurture it into a long-standing tradition. Though it can take several shapes and forms, the basic premise of having students pledge a solemn vow to compassionately serve humanity is one that desperately needs to be promulgated. Nonetheless, the white coat ceremony is not a magic bullet and alone, it will accomplish little. It is but one piece of an intricate educational puzzle. However, if a school of pharmacy looks upon such a ritual as the symbolic cornerstone of an omnipresent humanistic theme that is integrated throughout the curriculum, with enthusiastic support from the entire faculty, the results are likely to be astounding.

The product of humanism, when practiced by professionals, is professionalism. Perhaps that is what has been missing from the equation—humanism begets professionalism. It is a simple formula that could hold the key to successfully professionalizing pharmacy students. The white coat ceremony is the first major step on a humanistic journey for students, and if academia rises to the challenge, that step might someday be seen as a giant leap forward in the pursuit of professionalism.

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Table I.

Table I. Schools of pharmacy that conduct a white coat ceremony (as of May, 2002)

Albany College of Pharmacy
Arnold and Marie Schwartz College of Pharmacy
Auburn University
Butler University
Chicago College of Pharmacy
Creighton University
Drake University
Duquesne University
Ferris State University
Howard University
Idaho State University
Massachusetts College of Pharmacy at Worcester
Medical University of South Carolina
Midwestern University at Glendale
Northeastern University
Ohio Northern University
Ohio State University
Oregon State University
Palm Beach Atlantic College
Purdue University
Rutgers
Samford University
Shenandoah University
South Dakota State University
St. John's University
Texas Tech University
University of Rhode Island
University at Buffalo SUNY
University of Arizona
University of California at San Francisco
University of Cincinnati
University of Colorado
University of Florida
University of Georgia
University of Houston
University of Illinois at Chicago
University of Iowa
University of Kentucky
University of Maryland
University of Mississippi
University of Nebraska
University of Puerto Rico
University of Southern California
University of Tennessee
University of Texas at Austin
University of Washington
Virginia Commonwealth University
Washington State University
Wayne State University
West Virginia University
Western University of Health Sciences
Wilkes University

Table II.

Table II. Schools of pharmacy planning to implement a white coat ceremony (*as of May, 2002*)

Campbell University
Massachusetts College of Pharmacy at Boston
Mercer University
St. Louis College of Pharmacy
Texas Southern University
University of Connecticut
University of Missouri at Kansas City
University of Pittsburg
University of the Pacific
University of Utah

Table III.

Table III. Number of schools that include each of the 6 white coat ceremony features suggested by the Gold Foundation

1	Students' family and friends invited	38 (78%)
2	Respected leaders welcome students	46 (94%)
3	Keynote address given by role model	35 (71%)
4	Students "cloaked" with a white coat	40 (82%)
5	Students pledge a professional oath	40 (82%)
6	Reception held after ceremony	37 (76%)

Results compiled from the 49 schools that provided information.

Figure Legends

Figure 1. Group photograph of students at Palm Beach Atlantic University after receiving their white coats at the school's first professional covenant ceremony.

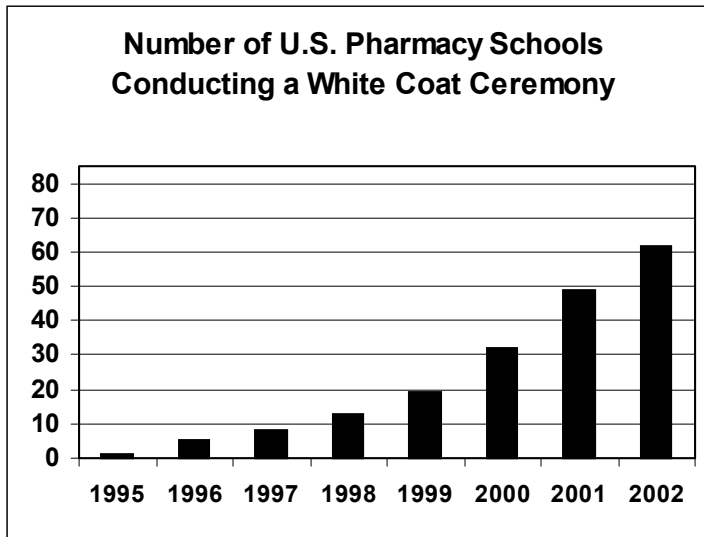
Figure 2. Graphic representation of the number of pharmacy schools that reported having conducted a white coat ceremony by year, since 1995. The figure for 2002 includes the 10 schools that were planning their first white coat ceremony at the time of the survey (May, 2002).

Figure 1.



*PBA School of Pharmacy
January 19, 2002*

Figure 2.



Appendix A.

Appendix A. The Professional Covenant recited by students at the Palm Beach Atlantic University School of Pharmacy

Lord,

I, (insert name), stand before you this day, January 19, 2002, as a member of the Class of 2005 in the School of Pharmacy, Palm Beach Atlantic University. I pledge to You, in the presence of family, friends, classmates, and faculty, that I shall devote my fullest effort and attention to the successful completion of this Doctor of Pharmacy program. In so doing, I willingly accept the roles and responsibilities that are incumbent upon being a pharmacist committed to Judeo-Christian principles, and acknowledge that my primary professional mission is to serve.

As I complete the academic requirements to become a pharmacist, help me remember that You are with me, leading the way. Grant me the will to continually grow as a health professional and to always perform to the best of my ability. Guide me to be a person of the highest ethical character, blessed with both wisdom and compassion. Inspire me to practice pharmacy as a dedicated servant of humanity—one who never ceases to be humbled by the privilege of serving the pharmaceutical care needs of Your children.

Pharmacy is a profession to which You have called me, Lord. I pray that those who entrust their health and well-being to me shall feel the guiding touch of Your hand in the services that I provide. My every effort will be directed toward that end. I commit myself to this professional covenant in Your name. Amen.

Appendix B.

Appendix B. The oath developed by the APhA–ASP and the AACP Council of Deans Task Force on Professionalism, 1994 (2).

OATH of a PHARMACIST

I, (insert name), vow to devote my professional life to the service of all humankind through the profession of pharmacy.

- I will consider the welfare of humanity and relief of human suffering my primary concerns.
- I will apply my knowledge, experience, and skills to the best of my ability to assure optimal drug therapy outcomes for the patients I serve.
- I will keep abreast of developments and maintain professional competency in my profession of pharmacy.
- I will maintain the highest principles of moral, ethical, and legal conduct.
- I will embrace and advocate change in the profession of pharmacy that improves patient care.

I take these vows voluntarily with the full realization of the responsibility with which I am entrusted by the public.