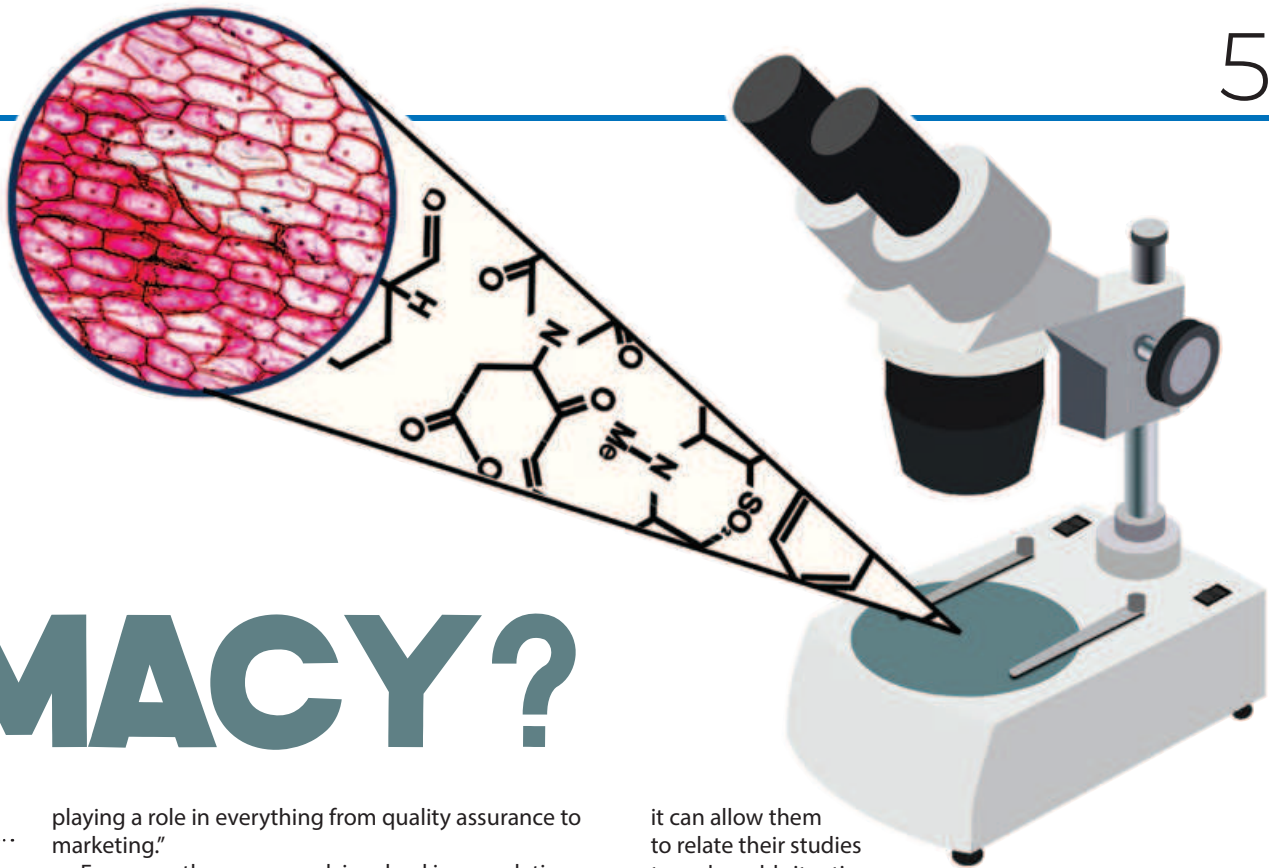


EDU GUIDE

Should you consider studying

PHARMACY?



ADRITA ZAIMA ISLAM and SHANUM SARKAR

While sifting through the catalogues of majors offered by different universities, most science students endow little more than a cursory glance at Pharmacy. However, with the recent influx of students exploring the vast world of life sciences, Pharmacy has started to see a stratospheric increase in interested youths.

This is partly due to the rise of more universities offering Pharmacy. Dr Sharmind Neelotpol, Associate Professor at the School of Pharmacy at BRAC University (BRACU), says “Back when I was studying Pharmacy Jahangirnagar University many years ago, a lot of my peers would move abroad due to the lack of job opportunities in this sector. However, the Drugs (Control) Ordinance, 1982, granted Bangladeshi pharmacists the authority to approve the launch of drugs into the market, and subsequently, more jobs opened up. The increasing emphasis on quality control of drugs has further increased the demand for pharmacists. So, Pharmacy programs started being offered in many private and public universities.”

Biplob Sen, a pharmacist by education and the head of marketing for Animal Health at Square Pharmaceuticals Limited by trade with 30 years of experience in the pharmaceutical industry corroborates this sentiment. “When I started studying Pharmacy, pharmacists were mostly involved in only the manufacturing aspect. However, following the Ordinance of 1982, jobs have been created in almost every section of the field and pharmacists are now

playing a role in everything from quality assurance to marketing.”

For many, the coursework involved in completing a Pharmacy undergraduate degree can seem daunting. According to Dr Sharmind, all universities that offer Pharmacy have a similar core curriculum because all course structures have to be approved through the University Grant Council (UGC) and the Pharmacy Council of Bangladesh (PCB). At most universities, the BPharm professional degree is an intensive 4 or 5-year program consisting of 164 or 199 credits.

Speaking on how well his educational background prepared him for a real job in the pharmaceutical industry, Biplob Sen adds, “There was certainly a gap between the theory I learned and practical application I had to do. I learned a lot of things while on the field. That being said, though, I was fascinated with the biological world and the possibility of creating new avenues and finding new applications kept me going.”

Nowadays, the successful completion of a BPharm degree will often require students to pursue industrial training internships at pharmaceutical companies, hospitals, or medical colleges at some point over the course of their study. Thus, institutes of higher education are making an active effort to bridge that disparity between practical and theoretical learning to provide students with a well-rounded understanding of the profession. A large number of seminars are also held every year on different topics related to pharmaceutical sciences and they are conducted by industry professionals. These are open to Pharmacy students and

it can allow them to relate their studies to real-world situations.

Apart from its impact on the job market, Pharmacy has been advancing significantly in the field of research. Dr Sharmind highlighted several initiatives at BRACU aimed at involving students in research. She explained, “We actively participate in research collaborations, including partnerships with Renata, Beximco, and King’s College London. These collaborations encompass the exchange of faculty members, students, and research initiatives, creating a conducive environment for learning, research, and fostering independence.”

Even with research opportunities at universities, however, there’s debate about their quality and funding. Afia Mobasshira Rodosi, a 3rd year student at Dhaka University, opines, “While theory classes are well-taught, the need for better lab facilities is evident. The research field lacks prestige and needs more resources for an improved learning experience. Despite helpful teachers, the sector requires significant improvement in the organisation.”

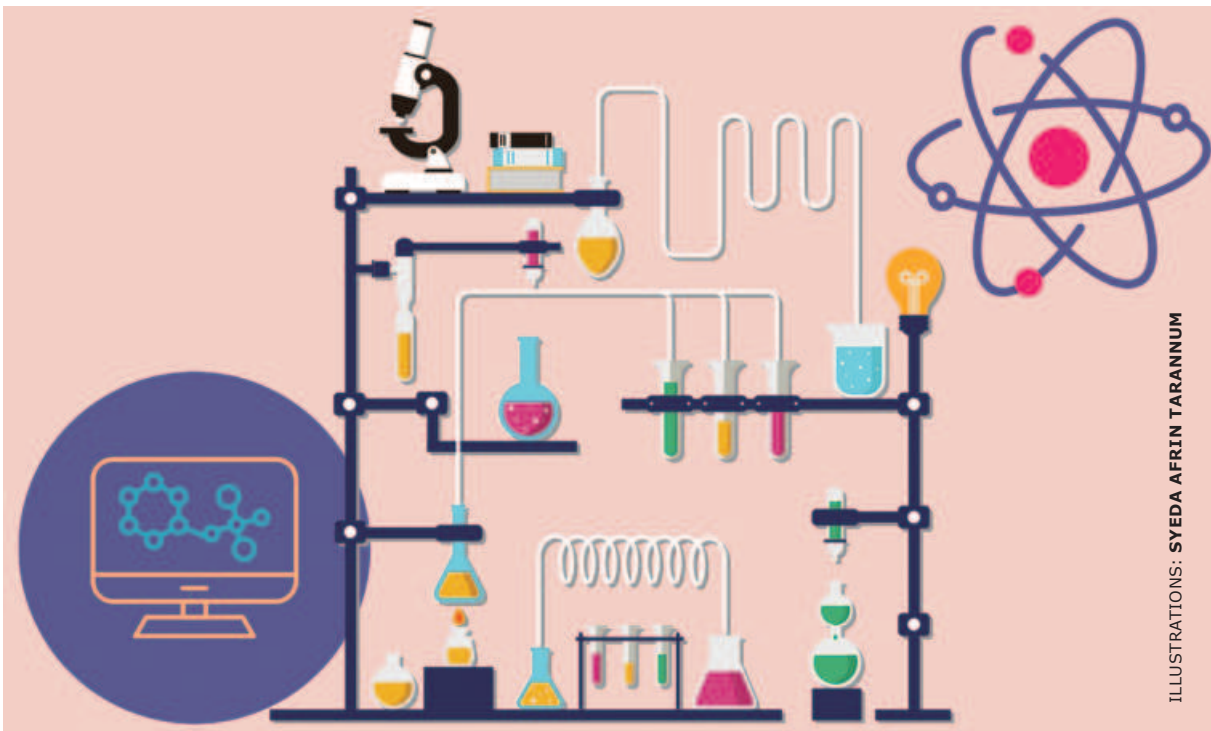
Barsha Aziz*, an employee at one of the largest pharmaceutical companies in the country, emphasises the lack of research in the Pharmacy industry in Bangladesh. “In developing countries like Bangladesh, we neither have the time nor budget to support research into discovering or designing new drugs to a significant degree. There is some research going on in some of the very influential companies. However, the tediousness and lengthiness of the process, assuring that the new drug meets the market standard, is a huge obstacle,” she elaborates.

However, the increasing funding in the pharmaceutical business and the continuing boom of the industry means that there is an incentive for companies to invest in research. Similarly, the rise in the number of collaborations with outside entities will allow universities to create more opportunities and possibilities for student-driven research.

Pharmacy could be the perfect crossroad if your interests encompass public health and chemistry. For Rodosi, the choice was simple. “To know the chemical nature of any living substance has always fascinated me. I chose pharmaceutical science because I knew it would satisfy my curiosity and help me find the answers to all my intellectual inquiries.”

Pharmacy not only provides you with the opportunity to develop a career that will allow you to have a fulfilling professional life, but it also gives you the scope to have a positive impact on people. As a pharmacist, the potential for scientific discovery will lie at every corner and the ability to improve people’s quality of life will be within your grasp. So, why not consider it?

*Name has been changed upon request.



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