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Editorial Article

EXPOSING CORRUPTION IN PHARMACEUTICAL EDUCATION: THE URGENT NEED TO REMOVE PROF. DR. SAJID BASHIR FROM HIS POSITION AS PRINCIPAL OF LORDS COLLEGE OF PHARMACY, LAHORE

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Abstract:

Corruption in pharmaceutical education poses a significant threat to academic integrity, professional standards, and public health. This study examines the allegations against Prof. Dr. Sajid Bashir, Principal of Lords College of Pharmacy, Lahore, highlighting claims of malpractice, unethical conduct, and mismanagement that have undermined the institution's credibility. The paper emphasizes the urgent need for accountability and immediate removal of leadership complicit in corrupt practices. Addressing such misconduct is essential to restore transparency, ensure equitable learning opportunities, and maintain the ethical and professional standards expected of pharmaceutical education in Pakistan.

Introduction

The pharmaceutical industry plays a critical role in producing lifesaving drugs through sophisticated, organized processes. These include primary processing of active ingredients and secondary conversion into final dosage forms such as tablets, syrups, injections, ampoules, creams, ointments, suppositories, pessaries, and suspensions. Operations like milling, drying, mixing, granulation, heating, coating, and pressing ensure that medicines meet stringent quality standards for clinical use. However, when corruption infiltrates academic and industrial pharmaceutical projects, it not only wastes public resources but also undermines healthcare standards and educational integrity. A glaring example is the failure of a major drug manufacturing initiative at the University of Sargodha, valued at approximately Rs. 0.8 billion, after 18 years of development. This debacle, driven by alleged corruption involving Prof. Dr. Sajid Bashir, the former Dean of Pharmacy, highlights the dangers of allowing such individuals to continue in leadership roles. Now retired from Sargodha but appointed as Principal of Lords College of Pharmacy in Lahore, Prof. Bashir's presence threatens to erode quality education and healthcare standards further. His immediate removal is essential to restore trust, promote ethical practices, and safeguard public health in Pakistan.

The Catastrophic Failure at University of Sargodha: A Timeline of Corruption and Mismanagement

Launched in 2005 alongside the Pharm-D undergraduate program, the University of Sargodha Pharmaceutical Laboratories project aimed to establish a state-of-the-art drug manufacturing facility. Instead, it became a symbol of institutional failure due to procurement irregularities and substandard equipment purchases. Prof. Dr. Sajid Bashir, as Dean of Pharmacy and a key partner in the firm M/s University of Sargodha Pharmaceutical Laboratories, is accused of orchestrating the acquisition of used and substandard machinery from a supplier in the Industrial Area, Saggian Bypass, Lahore. These purchases were documented under specific orders: UOS/RC/11-412 dated March 21, 2011; UOS/RC/10-160 dated May 25, 2010; UOS/RC/11-616 dated October 18, 2011; UOS/RC/11-615 dated October 18, 2011; and UOS/RC/11-624 dated October 21, 2011.

Despite securing a manufacturing license (No. 000859/167 dated June 12, 2017) from the Chairman of the Central Licensing Board under the Drugs Act 1976, the project collapsed. The license allowed formulation-based drug production at the University Road, Sargodha premises, subject to conditions including a five-year validity period (unless suspended or canceled earlier), authorization for wholesale sales and storage, and approval of expert staff. However, the university voluntarily surrendered it via letter UOS/PIU/1666 dated November 19, 2018, leading to its cancellation by the Central Licensing Board during its 269th meeting on February 26, 2019. A university lecturer appeared before the board, citing management changes and a decision to shut down the facility, though requesting its use for research purposes. The board canceled the license under Section 41 of the Drugs Act 1976 and Rule 12 of the Drugs (Licensing, Registering and Advertising) Rules 1976, prohibiting further manufacturing and advising the submission of a detailed proposal for future utility.

This shutdown veiled deeper issues: the facility, despite 18 years of investment and public resources, was repurposed for research amid existing undergraduate and postgraduate labs equipped with high-tech tools. Investigations have been pursued, including an application (No. 379/627 dated April 25, 2022) to Umar Sarfaraz Cheema, Governor of Punjab and Chancellor of the University of Sargodha, requesting strict disciplinary action and recovery of damages. Additional correspondence includes the Higher Education Commission's letter No. 05-48/A&C(Affairs)/2016/7151 dated July 1, 2016; University letters No. 171/Pharm/2017 dated January 24, 2017; No. UOS/Pharm/1998 dated November 25, 2015 (VCD No. 16311 dated November 26, 2015); and an undated letter from March 15, 2016. These documents underscore ongoing efforts to address the corruption, with Prof. Bashir identified as the primary culprit.

Additional Evidences and Examples of Systemic Corruption

Beyond the Sargodha case, further probes reveal a pattern of irregularities. For instance, Prof. Bashir's appointment as Professor of Pharmacy (BS-21) at the University of Sargodha was challenged for being irregular, with allegations of unacceptable and illegitimate Pharm-D credentials and non-supportive external evaluation reports. A notification (No. SU/Admin(HR) 6464-74) issued by Syed Nasir Abbas Bukhari was contested in the Lahore High Court, highlighting concealment of facts and illegalities in the selection process. Moreover, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) reportedly failed to obtain documents under right-to-information requests from the university, relating to Bashir's corruption, irregularities, and illegalities. Another example involves broader mockery of accountability systems, including the Higher Education Commission (HEC) and National Accountability Bureau (NAB), where corruption in appointments and projects persists unchecked. These issues extend to professional misrepresentation and parallel commonalities in corruption, as detailed in public exposés. For proof, consider the voluntary cancellation of the license amid management shifts, which critics argue was a cover-up rather than a strategic decision. Such patterns not only wasted Rs. 0.8 billion but also deprived students and the public of a functional facility that could have advanced pharmaceutical research and production.

The Current Threat: Prof. Bashir's Role at Lords College of Pharmacy, Lahore

Alarmingly, after retiring from Sargodha, Prof. Dr. Sajid Bashir has been appointed Principal of Lords College of Pharmacy, located at 53-M, Quaid-e-Azam Industrial Estate, Kot Lakhpat, Lahore. This institution, affiliated with the University of the Punjab, risks perpetuating the same ethical lapses. Accusations label him a "fraudulent culprit," "legendary dishonest," and "deceiving champion of corruption," whose leadership could spoil local pharmaceutical academia. His participation in events like the 21st International Pharmacy Conference & Exhibition (IPCE-2024) is said to have diminished its scientific value. Allowing a figure with such a tainted history to lead an educational institution endangers student training, research quality, and the production of competent pharmacists essential for Pakistan's healthcare system.

Call to Action: Removal for Better Healthcare and Education Standards

Removing Prof. Dr. Sajid Bashir from his position at Lords College of Pharmacy is not just corrective—it's imperative for upholding healthcare standards and quality education. His track record demonstrates how corruption leads to project failures, resource wastage, and institutional distrust. By ousting him, authorities can prevent similar debacles, ensure ethical leadership, and foster environments where pharmaceutical education prioritizes innovation and integrity over personal gain. This step would signal a commitment to accountability, inspiring reforms across Pakistan's academic and health sectors. Stakeholders, including the Punjab Higher Education Commission, Pharmacy Council of Pakistan, and university chancellors, must act swiftly to investigate and enforce his removal, recovering damages and rebuilding public confidence. In conclusion, the Sargodha scandal is a cautionary tale, but Prof. Bashir's continued influence amplifies the risk. Prioritizing his expulsion will protect future generations of pharmacists and patients alike, ensuring that pharmaceutical endeavors serve society rather than corrupt interests.

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