Ethics in healthcare as we know it today generally has its roots in history from the time of Hippocrates, with the keystone being the Hippocratic Oath. This oath served a number of purposes, including binding together healthcare professionals into a cohesive and effective social force with a clearly articulated focus on principles of patient care, privacy and to “do no harm”.

There is great power in making a promise to serve a greater cause than one’s own comfort and well-being. This commitment is the essence of professionalism, and proclaiming that commitment aloud and in public establishes a firmer foundation for accountability than merely being aware of the profession’s code of ethics.

In the USA and Canada many pharmacy schools hold “white-coat ceremonies” when students begin their studies. In other countries, newly graduated or licensed pharmacists take a pledge of professionalism. It has taken two years for the concept of an FIP model oath to take shape. FIP’s model oath was drafted by the Working Group on Pharmacist Ethics and Professional Autonomy on the premise that an “oath of a pharmacist”, if used properly, can be an important instrument in deepening pharmacists’ sense of professional obligation.

The working group, after intense consultation, developed a number of proposals and submitted them to the FIP for approval — one of these was that FIP recommend an oath-taking ceremony for entry-level graduates in all pharmacy educational institutions.

International perspective
The FIP oath is similar to pharmacist oaths already used in some countries. The working group collected such oaths and prepared a draft that included features of these existing documents and vetted the draft with the leaders of FIP member organisations. One advantage of the FIP model oath is that pharmacists can be confident it was prepared with an international perspective, taking into account the most fundamental principles that guide the ethical behaviour of members of our profession.

The FIP oath is intended for use at events in colleges of pharmacy to launch students toward their studies, or at graduation ceremonies and other public events. Mentors can reinforce the promise made at such a ceremony during experiential education and internships. In addition, established practitioners can be invited to repeat this promise at professional conferences. Colleges of pharmacy and pharmacist associations around the world may adapt the FIP model oath to particular facets of the culture and needs in their countries.

All health professionals regularly face ethical and moral challenges and can benefit from a reminder, from time to time, of the commitment they made to support, above all, the health and well-being of those they serve. Pharmacists might even consider posting a copy of the oath in their practice setting. After the oath was adopted last month, attendees at the FIP congress in Bangkok were enthusiastic. Several commented that they experienced a renewed surge of pride and self-esteem in their chosen profession. In its simplicity and clarity, the pharmacist’s oath has great power to keep us focused on the altruistic reasons that led us into this profession in the first place.

Deepening our sense of professional obligation:

AN OATH FOR PHARMACISTS

As a pharmacist, I vow to serve humanity and to support my profession’s ideals and commitments.

I shall be guided in all dimensions of my life by the highest standards of human conduct.
I shall apply the full measure of my knowledge and abilities to supporting the health and well-being of all those I serve.
I shall always place the needs of all those I serve above my personal interests and considerations.
I shall treat all those I serve equally, fairly and with respect, regardless of gender, race, ethnicity, religion, culture or political beliefs.
I shall protect the confidentiality of personal and health information entrusted to me.
I shall maintain my professional knowledge and competence throughout my career.
I shall support the advancement of knowledge and standards of practice in pharmacy.
I shall nurture the preparation of future members of my profession.
I shall use all opportunities to develop collaborative practice with all healthcare professionals in my environment.

In taking this solemn oath / making this promise, I honour those who have supported my development as a pharmacist and commit myself never to act in a manner that is contrary to these vows.

Pharmacist: Signature: Date:

Adopted by the FIP Council on 31 August 2014, in Bangkok, Thailand

Click here for a printable version of the Oath.

The Council of FIP — the General Assembly of FIP, primarily made up of representatives of national pharmacy associations around the world — adopted a model oath for pharmacists in September. William Zellmer and Betty Chaar, co-chairs of FIP’s Working Group on Professionalism and Autonomy in Pharmacy, explain its value.