

General agreement on trade services (GATS) and pharmacy education

Abdel Aziz Saleh

*World Health Organization, Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean,
P.O. Box 7608, Nasr City (11371) Cairo – Egypt.*

Purpose. The General Agreement on Trade Services (GATS) is one of the WTO Agreements which aim at promoting free trade on services in various sectors. Member States are requested to express their commitment to open the domestic market in various services sector to the global free trade. The pharmaceutical services and higher education sectors are areas where the global GATS agreement can be applied. The various modes of global trade in services are: a) Cross-border supply of services, b) Consumption abroad, c) Commercial presence, and d) Movement of national persons. It should be emphasized that any commitment to GATS agreement should be based on its implication on public health goals and objectives as well as on the overall national socioeconomic development. Of special importance to pharmacy schools are the following two issues. 1) How can we ensure that pharmacy graduates from Arab schools of pharmacy are globally recognized? This can facilitate the implementation of the forth GATS mode of “movement of national persons.” 2) Regulation of pharmacy education through distance learning programmes. This is in addition to the ongoing tendency to accept the establishment of branches of foreign universities (commercial presence mode) in Arab countries. These challenges to pharmacy profession and pharmacy education strongly encourage schools of pharmacy in our region to continue their efforts for curriculum development and establishing a sound accreditation system. Pharmacy schools should also be concerned with the implication of GATS on pharmaceutical services particularly cross-border sales of medicines and telepharmacy services. They should therefore carry out field studies and advice on the appropriate national regulations to control these activities.