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PROPOSITION 13 AND PHARMACEUTICAL SCIENTISTS

There's an old maxim that nobody worries about money except the people who don't have it. The same thing probably can be said about employment.

In recent years, a debate has been raging about whether there is or is not a surplus of practicing pharmacists in the United States. In the view of many educators, the problem is not one of too many pharmacists but rather of mal-distribution or of underutilization. The contrary views are that: (a) even if there is a shortage in some isolated geographic area, schools several thousand miles away should not continue to accelerate their enrollments; and (b) until meaningful progress is made in expanding practitioner roles, it is foolish to pour out a surplus of graduates who will have no opportunity to fulfill such roles.

But aside from the employment situation at the professional practice level, we also hear occasional stories about unemployment among pharmaceutical scientists. Fortunately, there appears to be no widespread problem in this area. Nevertheless, it is extremely difficult to judge just how prevalent unemployment or marginal employment is among scientists. Lack of hard data can result in giving undue weight to anecdotes about individual scientists who are either without jobs or at best getting along by driving taxicabs.

Given this situation, many of our readers may be interested in a report just recently released concerning a survey conducted by the Commission on Human Resources of the National Research Council. The report is entitled *Science, Engineering, and Humanities Doctorates in the United States: 1977 Profile*, and it presents a comprehensive survey of persons who have earned research doctorates since 1934.

All in all, the picture would have to be rated as "not bad" in terms of the kinds of people who would primarily be identified with the pharmaceutical sciences.

Specifically, at the time the study was conducted—in February 1977—Bureau of Labor Statistics data showed that the U.S. labor force as a whole had an unemployment rate of 8.5 percent, while for U.S. workers with five or more years of college training, the unemployment rate was 2.3 percent.

The NRC report revealed that 2.9 percent of those holding doctorates in humanities were involuntarily unemployed, and the corresponding figure for holders of doctorates in science or engineering was a rather low 1.2 percent.

Moreover, it was found that of the fortunate 98.8 percent with jobs, only 6.2 percent of the doctorate-holders in science or engineering were working in non-scientific fields, and for some of these it was by personal choice rather than necessity.

There are loads of other statistics in this 98-page NRC report covering average salaries by field of employment, employment rates broken down by sex, and assorted other tabulations, but the key figures seem to reveal a rather healthy employment situation.

This effort at assessment seems to be especially timely in view of the recent action by the electorate in the state of California concerning overwhelming adoption of the so-called "Proposition 13." Although this referendum is specifically related to a cutback and ceiling on property taxes, it is being broadly interpreted as symptomatic of a nationwide rebellion of taxpayers. In turn, this is expected to have the effect of concomitant reductions in government spending with consequent contraction of government programs and funding.

The short-term impact will undoubtedly be traumatic for those directly affected. However, some economists believe that such a change of national direction is necessary to bring raging inflation under control and to restore the nation's economy to a solid basis.

The U.S. has never done much about establishing long-term goals and adhering to the programs necessary to reach those objectives. Hence, there have been periodic spurts in which one thing or another becomes the temporary fashion, and things get somewhat out of balance. Government taxation and spending appear to have reached such a high-level mark in the public opinion. Viewed in this light, Proposition 13 represents an effort to restore balance which will stabilize the economy as well as the value of the dollar. In the long run, this can only have a beneficial effect for the great mass of our people by assuring both high employment and stable remuneration.

Pharmacy practitioners as well as pharmaceutical scientists can expect to share in, and to benefit from, such a broad-based result. The NRC report told us where we presently stand; Proposition 13 may give us a hint as to where we are going.

Edward G. Feldmann