



Editorial

[Translated article] The challenge of the generational gap

El reto de la convivencia generacional



If you remember where you were during the 1992 Olympic Games, or the attack on the Twin Towers marked your life, we belong to different generations. Historical and cultural events including economic recessions, technological advances or revolutions, distinctively shape the behavioral patterns of the population. A generation is defined as a group of people who, having been born around the same time and having received similar education and cultural and social influences, adopt a similar attitude regarding thought or creation.¹

Although boundaries between different generations are not clearly identified by scientists, it is widely accepted that generations are separated by a time span of 15 to 20 years. In the current liquid, fast-paced world, where physical and virtual borders blur, it is not the date of birth but the use of technology what determines generational identity. Separating and identifying generations help understand them. However, we run the risk of perpetuating stereotypes or enhancing stigmas to differentiate generations.²

Baby-boomers (also known as boomers), born between 1946 and 1964, were raised in a period of peace and demographic growth and were instilled with a strong work ethic, a deep sense of responsibility and ambition. Boomers are avid readers and prefer face-to-face communication. They incorporated technology earlier into their home than in the workplace and are considered “analogical”.

Generation X (Gen Xers), born between 1965 and 1980, are self-sufficient and success-driven, traits forged during the 1973 economic crisis and the democratic transition in Spain. Gen Xers focused on their education and value cultural manifestations. They passed from an analogical childhood to a digital adulthood, which is why they are called ‘digital immigrants’.

Millennials, also known as the Y Generation, born between 1981 and 1996, grew up in the midst of the Internet revolution and feel comfortable with digital interaction. They are ‘digital natives’. Millennials are enthusiastic mobile users, reject traditional approaches, are entrepreneurial and self-sufficient, value teamwork, appreciate work-life balance, and have a constant feeling of frustration.³

Generation Z (zoomers) refers to people born from 1997. They were raised during the great expansion of the Internet. Zoomers rely heavily on their smartphones and generate contents that transform communication patterns, primarily through the social media. They are multitasking and are perceived as irreverent.

According to the WHO, in an aging Europe, more significantly in Spain, 40% of health professionals are older than 50 years and a third will retire by 2025. In contrast, according to the 2022 White Book, Hospital Pharmacy (HP) professionals in Spain are young, as 66% of pharmacists are 30 to 50 years old and only 6% are older than 60.⁴

Based on the SEFH membership database, four generations of pharmacists are currently working in Spanish Pharmacy Services, of which 8% are boomers, 32% are Gen Xers; 52% are millennials; and 8% are zoomers.

The generational gap¹ may lead people and professionals to work separately in groups using different approaches, influenced by their different ways to understand life. This duality manifests as the confrontation between tradition and modernity, between the established and innovation, influences learning and communication methods, and shapes interests and values. But, how does this duality impact HP practices? How should this duality be approached at HPs?

The SEFH Mentor Group conducted a survey to assess intergenerational relationships in HPs and determine their impact on pharmacist learning and training. This Survey provides an insight into the expectations and motivations of the different age groups of hospital pharmacists in Spain. The results obtained provide a snapshot of the state of affairs in intergenerational coexistence in HPs in Spain.⁵ Exploring the generational gap invites to reflect about the origins, current situation and future challenges of HP. The results of this Survey also allow for exploiting the opportunities associated with generational diversity.

Whereas boomers and Gen-X mentors often wonder why residents do not check their e-mail, zoomers cannot understand why their mentors do not use collaboration tools such as Slack. Why some call it life-work balance and others name it lack of commitment? These different views in day-to-day work are manifestations of the generational gap and are not necessarily irreconcilable. Leaving stereotypes apart, there is a common ground where the experience provided by a generation can be complemented by the innovation contributed by other generations.

The results of this Survey will help identify areas for improvement to enhance professional well-being.⁶

Motivations at work: professional priorities and motivations vary across generations, which may influence the way people engage in work. The main motivation shared by all HP generations, without statistical differences, is to improve patient care. Interestingly, the X-Gen is more inclined towards measuring results and efficiency, whereas the Z-Gen prioritizes raising awareness of the role of Hospital Pharmacy.

There is a clear gap in the way the different generations perceive the state of affairs in HP, with older generations (boomers and Gen Xers) being more optimistic and millennials having a more pessimistic view. This discordance makes it necessary to examine new ways to adapt our practices to the varied expectations of our team members. We should also consider whether our profession sufficiently attracts the interest of newly graduated pharmacists. Differences were also observed

in the future challenges identified. Whereas digitalization is a priority for all generations, millennials and zoomers emphasize super specialization and integration in multidisciplinary teams as priority challenges.

Beliefs and values: attitudes and concerns regarding the environment, gender equality or diversity varied significantly across generations, which may lead to confrontation and communication problems. Social aspects obtained a median score of 9 (on a 10-point scale), without age-based differences. Environment-related aspects were scored higher by the X-Gen, whereas the cost of living was the aspect that raised less concern among boomers.

Working methods: all generations were concerned about stress, followed by communication. There was a clear association between generation and work-life balance concerns, with millennials valuing work-life balance the most. This generation is currently focused on family life and appreciates flexible working hours. The Survey also unveiled differences across generations in relation to the rewards expected, with new generations prioritizing free time, professional exchange programs and trips. These differences require distinct incentive and leadership models, as young pharmacists have a quiet ambition, which does not involve forgoing personal and professional growth. Professionals who do not understand the added value of their work are not committed. Therefore, promoting self-leadership and co-leadership is essential for team building and the development of collective intelligence.⁷

The use of technology and its application to communication and learning models are crucial for professional relationships. Face-to-face versus online communication; paper versus electronic records; hierarchy of information versus self-learning. Boomers, who are mentors, can rely on young pharmacists to redesign operational procedures and improve lab performance through innovation. These synergies will help enhance team cohesion and promote a more inclusive and enriching work environment.

We can take advantage of generational differences by integrating the strengths of each generation. We can exploit the experience and innovative spirit of the different generations to enhance our HP Services, thus optimizing results and contributing to improving patient care. Generational coexistence is not a challenge but an opportunity to keep Hospital Pharmacy Services at the forefront and respond effectively to future challenges.

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