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THE health and well-being of the population is always an area that encourages investment and growth both in terms of hospital and medical care but now, perhaps more than ever, there is a real need to train the professionals that make the system function. Traditionally people think of doctors and nurses when it comes to health care. Nowadays, there is a great demand for scientists that analyse laboratory results generated by modern diagnostic technology. Thus, there has never been a better time to consider studying biomedical science.

Biomedical science

Biomedical scientists are often referred to as the "hidden team" within a health service. Patients often give little thought as to what happens to their specimens when they are sent to the pathology laboratory for testing. This is one area where biomedical scientists provide a key role in the diagnosis and treatment of patients. From screening cancer to diagnosing HIV, from blood transfusion to food poisoning and infection control, biomedical scientists are a vital part of modern health-care, working in partnership with doctors, nurses and other healthcare professionals. Without biomedical scientists, doctors would be unable to treat their patients effectively. accident & emergency departments and operating theatres

rely on biomedical scientists for emergency blood transfusions and blood grouping, testing for suspected overdoses and diagnosing many cancers or patients suspected of having a heart attack.

Biomedical science is the study of the human body in health and disease, and of laboratory procedures used to diagnose disease and monitor the effectiveness of any treatment. Within the UK there are many courses called Biomedical Science but they are certainly not all the same. The vast majority are general courses that cover general aspects of human biology or perhaps biochemistry. For courses that have professional body recognition you are looking for courses that are recognised by the Institute of Biomedical Sciences (IBMS) or the Health Professional Council (HPC).

These "Professional" courses initially focus much more on the human body and how it functions when healthy. As the courses progress you will learn about the diseases that affect the body as well as how they can be diagnosed in the laboratory. On a typical accredited course you will study all of the disciplines covered by the modern day biomedical scientists including clinical chemistry, microbiology, haematology, transfusion science, immunology and histopathology — all of which are underpinned by an extensive study of human

physiology, biochemistry, and molecular biology. In the final year of the degree, students will undertake a research

project, which will be closely linked to the research interest in the School.

Pharmacy

The Pharmacist is often a "people" person, most usually dealing with patients and the general public, through community, public and private hospital pharmacies or pharmaceutical industry. The vast majority of pharmacists work in the local community health sector and as such are often one of the first points of contact with the general public. Consequently they are a person of responsibility and trust within that community. With the change in the health care agenda Pharmacist training has moved from treating the symptoms and dispensing medicines to offering advice particularly with relation to the prevention of diseases. Being able to counsel patients is an important skill and features prominently in many pharmacy courses.

In the UK every pharmacy course must be accredited by the Royal Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain and is a four-year Masters course known as the Masters in Pharmacy (MPharm). However, each course is different but in general a course is structured to integrate topics of pharmacy practice, life sciences and

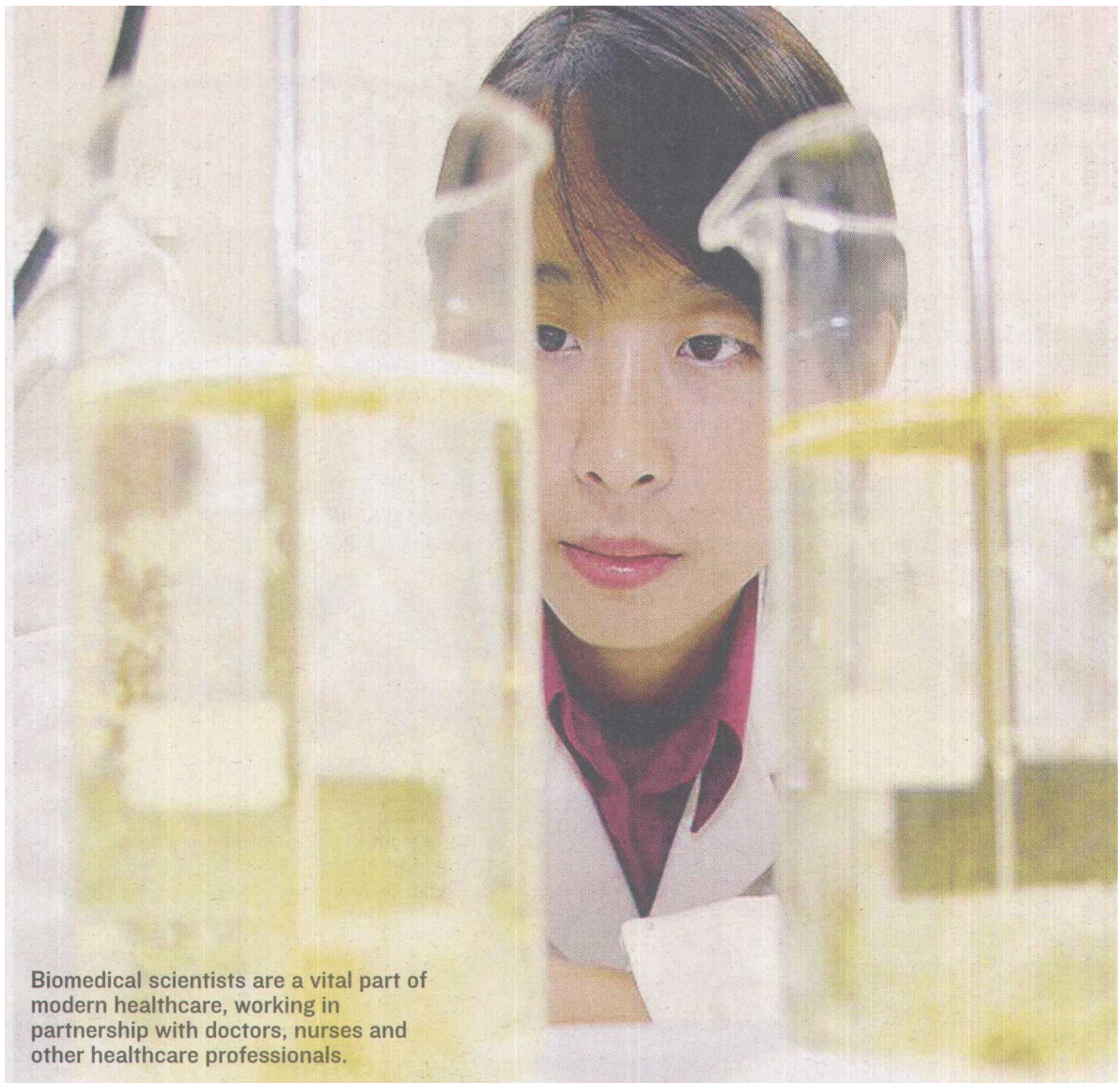
pharmaceutical sciences, and provides a solid basis for a career in community, hospital or industry pharmacy. You will look at the issues surrounding drug development and formulation, how medicines interact with the body, and the complex ethical issues and law governing the dispensing and supply of medicines to patients. A key part of being a pharmacist is recognising the role that you play in the delivery of health care to the public. MPharm students, upon graduation, must undertake a further year of practice-based study prior to registration as a pharmacist with the Royal Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain.

This article was written by Dr Darren Mernagh who is the Associate Head of the School of Pharmacy and Biomedical Sciences at the University of Portsmouth. He also teaches several specific course modules within the school such as Inherited Diseases, Molecular Biology, Genetic Engineering and Biochemistry. He has written about a dozen publications focused on DNA.

□ *The British Council is organising its annual Education UK exhibition in KL (March 20 & 21), Penang (March 23), Kuching (March 25) and Kota Kinabalu (March 27). For the list of participants, seminar schedule and scholarship information, please log on to www.educationuk.org.my*

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