

Inspiring Students to Become Healthcare-System Pharmacists

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As a pharmacist working in a teaching hospital for nearly 30 years, I have supervised hundreds of pharmacy students at all levels, from introductory to advanced pharmacy practice placements and residencies. I am also the director of the entry-to-practice PharmD program at Université de Montréal, and I regularly receive comments from students about their experiences during healthcare-system rotations. Some of these comments are positive, but others are unsettling. From what I have heard directly and according to student evaluations, some learners find that pharmacists are overwhelmed with their own work, are too demanding of the students, and show little interest in students' training. Conversely, most students who decide to pursue a career in healthcare-system pharmacy report having had great rotations, saying that their preceptors were enthusiastic, motivating, and interested in sharing their own experience.

Across Canada, there is a shortage of healthcare-system pharmacists, and interest in residency programs has been variable. In our training to become pharmacists, we are taught mainly *what* to teach the learners who follow in our footsteps, with less focus put on *how* to teach them. Yet being an inspiring model and an effective preceptor will influence the recruitment of healthcare-system pharmacists.

Here are some suggestions to improve experiential rotations for both you and your students:

- Being a preceptor is not an easy task, especially with the substantial workload that comes with clinical duties. It is easier to embed the responsibilities of the preceptor role into one's daily activities when the role of the clinical pharmacist is well defined and the tasks are organized and prioritized.
- Before the rotation starts, plan how it will unfold by reviewing the learning objectives and assessment criteria. At the beginning of the rotation, set clear goals and expectations (e.g., rotation objectives, expected tasks and assignments, assessments, dress code, punctuality, use of institutional resources) and answer the student's questions. Provide the student with materials and readings pertinent to your practice and your patients. These

steps will reduce any misunderstandings or missed learning opportunities.

- Create a positive learning environment, where students feel safe to learn, experiment, and ask questions. Many students are nervous about asking questions; try not to embarrass or intimidate them. Introduce the student to the other professionals and staff in your department to make them feel that they are part of the team.
- Use the student's knowledge and experiences to build on what they already know and to promote critical thinking and problem-solving. Students want to feel valued and useful. Give them tasks and assignments that provide pertinent educational experiences and contribute to patient care.
- Adapt expectations to the student's level (i.e., introductory vs advanced rotations or residencies). Setting expectations that are too high or poorly adapted to the student's level will be discouraging and will hinder learning.
- Be a positive role model by demonstrating respect and a caring attitude and by providing positive reinforcement to promote student motivation and engagement. You can do this by scheduling regular focused teaching encounters.
- Provide feedback regularly to assess the student's knowledge and attitudes. Check for understanding by asking the student to summarize your feedback and next steps. Schedule time to discuss formal assessments, and ask the student to compare your assessment with their own self-assessment. Identify differences, and then review and discuss them.

Healthcare-system experiential rotations give you the chance to showcase your work environment and potentially recruit pharmacists for future employment. Students are more likely to be influenced by who they encounter during their rotations than by what they are taught. Students value preceptors who are enthusiastic, interested, and supportive. If you enjoy your work, your student will enjoy theirs too.

Finally, I would recommend surveying students at the end of their rotations, asking for feedback on your preceptorship to help you identify any areas needing improvement and to confirm what is already working well.

Additional Resources

- 5 simple ways to be a star pharmacy preceptor. *Pharm Times*. 2016 Aug 3 [cited 2024 Jun 21]. Available from: <https://www.pharmacytimes.com/view/5-simple-ways-to-be-a-star-pharmacy-preceptor>
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