

## BECOMING A BETTER PRECEPTOR FOR PHARMACY STUDENTS

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**P**receptors play a vital role in developing competent pharmacists.<sup>(1)</sup> Expected to be proficient as clinicians and teachers, preceptors balance the provision of exemplary patient care together with a meaningful educational experience. In our training to become pharmacists, we were taught what to teach, but not how to teach. Here are five tips for becoming a better preceptor.



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### 1

#### Set expectations: prepare yourself, prepare your student.<sup>(2)</sup>

A well-organized rotation provides students with structure and a solid foundation for learning. Before an experiential placement starts, review rotation requirements and assessment criteria. Let pharmacy staff know when and how long the student will be there. Discuss the scope of the student's role and how they can contribute meaningfully to the workflow.

Prepare your student. Email a list of key websites or articles to introduce them to your practice area and patient population. Do you

expect them to work evening or weekend shifts? Let them know ahead of time so they can plan accordingly. Is there required employee training or computer access? If possible, facilitate completion of these tasks before students arrive to avoid delays in learning.

Dedicate time early in the rotation to discuss education and workplace-related expectations (e.g., rotation objectives, required assignments, assessments, dress code, punctuality). Agree on deadlines for completing assigned work. This will mitigate any misunderstandings or missed learning opportunities. Do not assume that if they have prior pharmacy experience, they will be familiar with everything you are. Ask them to describe their previous responsibilities rather than listing places worked.

Orient them to your site

with a tour and introduce them to your colleagues. Review a typical day; outline their responsibilities and how that will change as the rotation progresses. For example, the first week they may observe you process orders or counsel patients, but eventually they will be expected to take initiative in completing these tasks.

Review special clinic days, meetings or presentations involving the student and suggest they prepare a calendar of activities to assist with organization and time-management.

### 2

#### Find teachable moments.

Experiential placements allow

students to apply classroom learning to real practice settings. After orientation and discussing expectations, have your student create three to five individualized learning objectives. Review them together using SMART criteria (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Timing).<sup>(3)</sup>

Create a positive learning environment where students feel safe to experiment and ask questions.<sup>(4)</sup> Build on what they already know by using open-ended questions to promote critical thinking and problem-solving.<sup>(5)</sup> For example, if they are unsure if a medication is appropriate for a patient with co-morbidities, guide them to think systematically; ask what factors need to be considered and where can they find relevant information to make appropriate clinical decisions.<sup>(6,7)</sup>

Students want to feel valued.

Give them tasks that provide useful educational experiences and also contribute to the practice site and workflow. Start with simple, common tasks and gradually move to more complex. Challenge students who meet or surpass expectations with added responsibility or leadership opportunities.<sup>(2,6,7)</sup>

When confronted with unenthusiastic responses, foster motivation by framing the value of learning in a context that is relevant and relatable for the student. For example, someone with little interest in hospital practice could be encouraged to think about how creating clear and accurate discharge instructions will assist the community pharmacist.<sup>(5,8)</sup>

Keep teaching encounters focused and brief. Choose a few skills or therapeutic areas to concentrate on each week. Divide complex tasks or concepts into smaller units in order to build on previous learning and incorporate your feedback.<sup>(8,9)</sup>

Don't worry about finding the "perfect" patient for your student. Real practice presents unanticipated situations. If a patient encounter does not go as planned, use it as a teachable moment. For instance, discuss techniques for dealing with challenging patients or how to effectively communicate therapeutic recommendations to various healthcare providers.

## 3

**"See one do one."  
Be a positive role model.**

Students are constantly watching and quick to pick up inconsistencies in what we say versus how we act.<sup>(6)</sup> Having spent most of their schooling being observed and graded, students are eager to watch a "real" pharmacist in action.

Demonstrating respect, a caring attitude and providing positive reinforcement enhances student motivation and engagement. You can do this by maintaining regular

communication with your student. Lead by example through displaying curiosity for learning. Model collaborative patient care and team interactions before asking them to do the same.<sup>(8)</sup>

Show your commitment to self-directed and lifelong learning by offering tips for staying up to date with new information.<sup>(1,10)</sup> Authenticity is important—share your past mistakes, practice challenges and what you learned from them.

## 4

**Provide feedback regularly and label it.<sup>(11-13)</sup>**

Discuss how and when feedback will occur. Busy work environments may not allow for detailed feedback after every interaction. Setting the stage early helps establish a trusting and supportive relationship which improves the credibility of your feedback. Remind students that feedback is intended to guide them towards success in their rotations.

Strategies for effective feedback include: **1)** Find a private space for feedback discussions. **2)** Engage students in the discussion by asking them to reflect on their own performance:<sup>(6)</sup> "What did you do well?", "What could you do differently?" **3)** Prepare students to receive your feedback by "labelling it" (in other words, make your feedback explicit by prefacing your comments with "I'm providing you with feedback on..."). **4)** Base feedback on observed behaviours and specific examples.<sup>(14,15)</sup> **5)** Limit your suggestions to one or two that are high priority. **6)** Check for understanding by asking students to summarize your feedback and next steps.

Each day, write brief notes about what the student did well or could improve upon. This will make completing midpoint and final assessments easier because you will already have a list of concrete examples to support your ratings.<sup>(15)</sup>

Schedule time to discuss formal assessments. Ask the student to compare your assessment with their self-assessment. Focus your time reviewing areas of discrepancy. Often, differing points of view are related to mismatched expectations.

Demonstrate continuous reflection and self-assessment by periodically asking your student for feedback on your performance.<sup>(1)</sup> They will be reluctant to do this, so share an example of when someone gave you feedback and how you learned from it.

## 5

**It takes a village...  
ask for help.**

Experiential education could not happen without support and commitment from preceptors and countless others. Check if your interprofessional colleagues have learning opportunities for your student. If you are unsure about a student's performance, ask a colleague to observe. Anticipate and address problems early to minimize their impact. Connect with your organizational or faculty contacts for guidance and support.

### Summary

Experiential rotations provide a chance to showcase your practice environment and observe someone as a potential recruit for future positions. Students are more likely to be influenced by who rather than what they were taught. Students value preceptors who are enthusiastic, supportive and willing to help. If you enjoy the experience, your student will too. ☺

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