VIEWPOINTS

Why Did I Do It? Would I Do It Again? A 30-Year Homage

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Many of us were inspired to become educators because of the influence of one or more of our professors or teachers. Among others, I was especially inspired by Dr. Vince Lopez at Mercer University. To this day, 30 years after I graduated, while I am on a collegial first-name basis with most of my former teachers and colleagues from Mercer, Dr. Lopez is still Dr. Lopez to me. To refer to him otherwise just seemed impertinent. He remains a large presence to me as I remember what I learned from him. . .like he is still teaching me. He taught pharmacology, but more than that, he made it real, made me understand how I could use that information to improve wellness and relieve suffering, how I could integrate information and solve problems, and why a strong scientific foundation is essential to being a good practitioner. He took a personal interest in me as a student, and convinced me to continue into the PharmD program at Mercer. Most importantly, he helped me form my professional and personal identity, something Bob Smith emphasized in a previous address.¹ Dr. Lopez and another pharmacology professor at Mercer, Dr. John Holbrook, created and supervised a drug abuse education team that presented programs to community groups about drugs and drug abuse. They invited me to participate and I was hooked, pardon the pun. The satisfaction of helping others to understand drug abuse, chemical dependence, and drug therapy in general, and studying in the area as a student, led me to psychiatric pharmacy as a practice, teaching, and research emphasis. Working with students during postgraduate residency training confirmed to me that my heart was in teaching.

I believe effective education is servant leadership – educators serving people and inspiring students to serve. Although I take immense personal satisfaction from my work with people who suffer from psychiatric illnesses, I feel I have had a greater impact on patient care through the thousands of graduates I encountered as students over these many years as one of their teachers. I remember and

took a greater interest in some students more than others because I saw special potential in them, and a few of them are now in the academy.

Anyone who has been around the academy for a while has experienced both joy and frustration with our work. Now, for a variety of reasons, we are confronted with pressing recruitment, development, and retention challenges across all scientific and clinical disciplines in pharmacy. Efforts among committees and taskforces from every American Association of Colleges of Pharmacy (AACP) governance unit, recently emphasized in the agenda of past President Cindy Raehl,² have contributed insight and ideas. Fundamentally, however, I believe the issue boils down to individual professors taking a particular interest in individual students. I became an educator because someone helped me form an identity as an educator, helped me discover that teaching was really what I wanted to do, personally as well as professionally. Because (and despite) all I have experienced on this ride, I would do it again because I believe this is how I can best serve.

Specific strategies to address recruitment and retention challenges are much needed. The grounding of all of these strategies must be in individual relationships. Mentorship and development of individual students and trainees as future colleagues and people with personal and professional identities as educators, reaching out to them first, is an inefficient process, but is the essential element of all strategies.

I doubt Dr. Lopez really knows what an impact he had on me (and on others, too, I'm sure), but now, in the forum of this *Journal*, and if I might be ever so bold. . .thanks, Vince.

REFERENCES

1. Smith RE. Unleash the greatness. *Am J Pharm Educ.* 1999;63:436-41.
2. Raehl CL. Responding to the academy's needs. *Am J Pharm Educ.* 2007;71:Article 107.