VIEWPOINTS

The Intersection of Job Satisfaction and Preceptor Development: Opportunities for Academic Pharmacy Programs

Shane Paul Desselle, PhD, and Gretchen L. Peirce, PharmD, MS

University of Oklahoma College of Pharmacy

During the past couple of decades have been a host of studies on pharmacist job satisfaction and related quality of work life issues. The interest in this phenomenon is not surprising, given the stake in the profession that these pharmacy researchers have, as many are pharmacists themselves. Moreover, job satisfaction has implications for employee commitment and turnover—factors important in maintaining the labor supply of pharmacists to provide medication therapy management services.¹ Another interest in pharmacist job satisfaction might be pharmacy educators' desire to provide a realistic preview to students of a career that hopefully will one day bring them professional contentment and fulfillment. As such, Payakachat and colleagues address several important issues in their study of satisfaction among pharmacist preceptors in a recent issue of the *American Journal of Pharmaceutical Education* (<http://www.ajpe.org/doi/full/10.5688/ajpe758153>).²

The results of satisfaction studies of pharmacists have largely produced a body of equivocal results; that is, there have been considerable inconsistencies in the findings. Payakachat and colleagues allude to this in their discussion of the study results. They point out discrepancies among their findings and the findings of other researchers in regard to the effect of work setting and practitioner demographics.³⁻⁶ They also correctly assert that these equivocal results are in part a function of varied sampling strategies and study designs. These seemingly disparate results also may be a function of the instrumentation used to measure satisfaction and even the statistical strategies employed to analyze the data. Some strengths of Payakachat and colleagues' approach include a validated and reliable measure of job satisfaction and their use of an analysis of covariance model to account for potential confounders such as stress and workload, 2 of many factors that could skew the results.⁷

Studies of pharmacist job satisfaction have produced consistent results in some areas. For one, pharmacists have reported higher levels of satisfaction when they have more interaction with patients, are involved in the provision of cognitive services, and have greater opportunity to apply their knowledge and skill sets.^{8,9} Most pharmacists enjoy a higher quality of work life when they are afforded some autonomy.^{9,10} Overall, pharmacists are the

beneficiaries of relative high levels of work satisfaction with stable careers; however, pharmacists often feel undervalued and complain of poor line management, lack of recognition, and weak levels of support from their employing organization, with the perception that they are viewed merely as cogs in a larger wheel.^{11,12} The literature is largely in agreement that strong support from supervisors/managers of pharmacists can help ameliorate the deleterious effects of future uncertainty and foster pharmacists' work satisfaction and organizational commitment.^{5,10} Additionally, strength of desire to practice pharmacy has been implicated for both improvements in job satisfaction and reductions in pharmacists' turnover intentions.¹¹ To that end, Gaither called for a deeper understanding of the factors that underlie desire to practice and for inquiries into how pharmacists experience their work environments.¹³

It is these and other reasons that bring to bear the importance of Payakachat and colleagues' work.² Their study is among the first to examine a voluntary role assumed by pharmacists that might contribute to their self-actualization. Teaching and mentoring others can bring greater satisfaction to one's work life, and the opportunity to do so is one of the biggest draws of an academic career.¹⁴ For pharmacy programs, eliciting involvement by appointing preceptors might be one tool to encourage enrollment into postgraduate education once these preceptors have had an opportunity to teach students and become more involved with the professional curriculum. And wooing preceptors into postgraduate education might be just as effective a recruitment strategy as trying to attract current students who are straddled with debt, eager to embark on life's journey, and "burned out from school."

That being said, colleges and schools of pharmacy must do more to engage preceptors and make them feel more a part of the organization's family. Skrabel and colleagues found that nearly all preceptors responding to a survey believed that the quality of students' experience is improved when a preceptor is able to spend more time with the students; however, a number of preceptors reported that they lack the time to do so.¹⁵ Additionally, preceptors tend to overestimate the quality of their performance

when self-evaluations are compared to student evaluations.¹⁶ Academic programs cannot dictate pharmacists' workload, nor should they. They can, however, develop more strategic partnerships with pharmacy organizations that seek mutually beneficial gains from engaging preceptors in the academic enterprise. Boyle and colleagues provided innovative suggestions that go even beyond the recommendations of a previous Preceptor Development Task Force.¹⁷ These included recognizing preceptors' excellence, developing preceptors' educational skills, and facilitating preceptors' networking opportunities. Boyle and colleagues also touched on the development of strategic alliances with employers, such as creation of medication therapy management certificate programs. It will be critically important that administrators be creative in developing such alliances in ways that involve direct pecuniary benefits (eg, alternative types of faculty appointments, incentivizing preceptor opportunities) and non-pecuniary benefits (eg, joint public relations and media campaigns). Some of these strategies might cost academic institutions some money, but need not require considerable financial investments. The reinforcement and support of employing organizations can be helpful, as academic pharmacy programs attempt to engage preceptors and continuously increase the quality of experiential education, which is now approximately 30% of the professional program.

Engagement is key. Academic pharmacy programs must engage professional students, alumni, and other stakeholders. Many are critical of the various systems used to rank academic programs; however, these ranking systems are not unimportant. One concern is the selection of benchmarks used in these ranking systems. Among the more highly criticized indicators in the proportion of alumni giving back to, or remunerating the program; however, careful reflection about how to measure a program's success makes it hard to argue against this criterion. Engaged alumni are those more likely to be satisfied with their academic experience and successful in their careers. Precepting students is an incredibly important role that pharmacists can play, but is only one of the many synergistic endeavors possible between academic pharmacy programs, alumni, and pharmacy provider organizations.

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