LETTERS

In Search of a Professional Response

To the Editor. As a faculty member and administrator at a school of pharmacy, I am privileged to be a part of a dynamic education system that is constantly seeking improvement and excellence. However, this situation can be a double-edged sword. On one hand, we are not bound by traditions that might make changes slow to occur, but on the other hand, we don't yet have traditions to guide us when challenging situations arise.

One thought-provoking area has been the lack of professionally acceptable e-mails being sent by students when communicating with faculty and staff members and preceptors. These communications have ranged from being too abrupt or lacking essential information, to being disrespectful or rude, and certainly not following the spirit of the Pledge of Professionalism.¹ In faculty discussions, it was felt that, for the most part, the unacceptable style was not purposeful; it was the result of habits acquired by some Millennial generation students in their personal communications prior to entering pharmacy school. There should be a distinct difference between how a student writes an e-mail or text message to a friend vs a faculty member. With this in mind, an e-mail etiquette policy was created at our institution that listed the "shall" and "shall not" as well as included examples.

As with any policy, creation does not always equate with accordance, and some students still sent noncompliant e-mails. The issue then became how to respond in a professional manner to a student's unprofessional e-mail. Some colleagues said they just ignored unacceptable e-mails. Other faculty members were frustrated when they were put in this situation, feeling the need to respond to the student but not wanting to implicitly convey approval of a disrespectful correspondence.

As an attempt to respond to these unprofessional e-mails in a manner that would acknowledge receipt, indicate deficiencies, and increase student awareness and compliance, I created an e-mail response stating, "This e-mail was neither read nor acted upon because some or all of the format of the email is not in compliance with the University of Maryland Eastern Shore School of Pharmacy e-Professionalism Guidelines. Please redo this email using the proper format and resend." After instituting this response last semester, student acceptance has been high, no negative feedback has been received, and student e-mails have shown a definite improvement in their professional appearance.

As a final note, I had the privilege to attend the "e-Professionalism" roundtable at the 2013 American Association of Colleges of Pharmacy Annual Meeting in Chicago. The conversation primarily centered on disrespectful or rude student e-mails to faculty members and what could be done to correct this situation. After the other participants had expressed their views, I offered my above-mentioned response as a possible solution. To my surprise, everyone at the table found applicability with the idea, and I received a shower of business cards with requests that I send them a copy of my e-mail response. I hope that other schools find this type of response a useful tool for guiding their students to write e-mails that are well received in professional applications.

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REFERENCES

1. Pledge of Professionalism. Developed by the American Pharmacists Association Academy of Student Pharmacists and American Association of Colleges of Pharmacy Council of Deans (APhA-ASP/AACP-COD) Task Force on Professionalism; June 26, 1994. <http://www.aacp.org>. Accessed August 12, 2013.