VIEWPOINT

Reflections on Influencing the Next Generation of Pharmacists

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After boarding the plane to attend the 49th American Society of Health-System Pharmacists (ASHP) Midyear Clinical Meeting, one of our local residents prepared to set down beside me, leaving his new wife in a seat in front of us. I offered to change seats and squeezed into the window seat of the small regional jet bound for Atlanta to catch our connecting flight. As I glanced at the woman next to me, I noticed a distant familiarity—something I couldn't ignore. As I mustered courage to awkwardly ask who she was and introduced myself, I realized I was setting beside my fourth grade teacher, Mrs. Linda Miller.

We conversed for a while as our plane departed, and we shared several memories. Being from a small town, she had kept up with me over the years, primarily through stories from my parents. Despite the fact that we had not seen each other for more years than either of us cared to admit, we fondly remembered past times and, more importantly, the people involved in those times.

This experience during my cross-country journey made me reflect on my career path. Coming off a strenuous semester, which involved double teaching as a result of our curricular revision, it was nice to reflect on why we do what we do as educators. I recalled lessons learned from my first academic mentor Dr. Robert E. (Bob) Smith and the first book he gave me, *The Courage to Teach* by Parker Palmer.¹

As we started talking, Mrs. Miller reminisced about who I was as a student. She remembered that she often had to ask me to remove nonclass-related reading material from inside my science book. This wasn't a memory I had, but one vivid in her mind. I hope she remembered that I performed well in her class. I was then reminded about something Bob taught me early in my career. Students remember more about who we are as people, as teachers, than about what information we teach them.

In *The Courage to Teach*, Palmer states "...understanding my identity is the first and crucial step in finding new ways to teach: nothing I do differently as a teacher will make any difference to anyone if it is not rooted in my nature."² In essence, Palmer states that who we are is more important than what we teach. He describes a student who could not succinctly describe all of her good teachers because there was stark contrast between them, but she could

remember all her bad ones because in her mind they were all the same. We tell our students that patients care less about how much their health care providers know and more about how much those providers care. The same concept applies in the classroom.

It took a while for that to sink in early in my career and for me to understand what the message meant. The common trap, whether we admit it or not, is to see the student as an obstacle to overcome; yet the student is the reason we are educators. The days of research-focused academic appointments has given way to a new era of giving equal recognition to educators for their teaching ability. This begs the question about what makes a good teacher. That's what Bob was trying to convey to me.

What students remember is *how* we taught them, and more importantly *who* we were. The student cares less about the factual knowledge we impart and more about who the people are imparting the knowledge. Do we look into their eyes and see individuals with thoughts, cares, and concerns as valid as our own? Do we look at them as the most recent obstacle to completing another semester? The answer to these questions determines how we treat our students and ultimately, that is what they will remember. Moreover, modeling behavior, instead of telling students to do something, is an effective way to promote change in *their* behavior.³

When asked, most faculty members would likely envision they are leaving a lasting impact, a legacy if you will, on the students with whom they interact. Whether students agree could depend on how often faculty members hold intramural conversations to discuss what students need to do to improve instead of asking what they can do to facilitate their improvement. As a parent, I often ask myself why my children don't listen, only to realize they did—only they listened to my actions rather than my words. Students are no different, yet there is sometimes a disconnect between what we say and what we do.⁴ We have an amazing influence over our students during this crucial developmental phase in their lives. I hope I spend more time reflecting on how I can improve my influence over my students instead of trying to force them into some preconceived mold. By modeling respect, patience, caring, empathy, humility, and self-awareness, I

hope I focus more on who they are than what they become and how I inspired them, if at all. How did I encourage them to be leaders and to affect change? How did I help them learn a lesson about life while teaching them a lesson about pharmacy?

As I reflected on my encounter with Mrs. Miller, I remembered a woman who cared about her students. I remembered a woman who was brilliant and dedicated her life to teaching the next generation, multiple generations, for abysmal pay. I remembered someone who had significant influence on countless lives by expecting excellence in her classroom, setting high standards for her students, and continuing to devote herself to an underappreciated job year after year.

What will my students say about me 20 years from now, when my hair is gray and they've lived many years

of their lives? If they remember me at all, I hope they remember more about *who* I was than *what* I taught them. As the academy engages the new frontier of active learning, the discussion involving techniques and mechanics may be less important than the discussion about our inner beliefs and views, and perhaps most importantly, how we view, relate to, and treat our students.

REFERENCES

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