

Maximizing the relationship with your preceptor

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PRECEPTOR

Looking at your rotation schedule, you realize you have a rotation that wasn't your first choice. Moving forward, how do you make the best of the learning opportunity?

Not every rotation or every practice setting will be your passion within pharmacy practice; however, realize there is something to learn and opportunities to grow and develop new skills and knowledge in every rotation. Remember that the goal of rotations is to make you the most competent pharmacist possible, and each rotation will have something to contribute toward accomplishing that goal.

Set the tone

One of the most critical steps in establishing a strong relationship with your preceptor is your first impression: you can never make another. When contacting preceptors, pay attention to the "small" details, like using a professional e-mail address, and using their title versus their first name (until given permission). Also, reach out in advance, generally about 2 weeks before the start of the rotation. Ask about necessary preparations and notify them of any leave you need to take (i.e., professional meeting attendance).

Always offer to complete additional projects in return for time away from the rotation. Use this opportunity to request specific experiences that you may like to see during the rotation. Finally, once on the rotation, always have a "hot off the press" journal article or textbook that is relevant to the rotation with you to review during down time when rounds start late, etc. Your preceptor will notice your desire to learn, appreciate the initiative, and it may offer additional learning opportunities through "on the fly" topic discussions.

Maximize feedback

There are a few simple ways to maximize preceptor feedback. First, ask for more frequent feedback. Immediately following a patient encounter, journal club presentation, or topic discussion, ask your preceptor what you did well and what you could do to improve. You can view these as more snapshot evaluations over the course of the rotation as supplementation to the midpoint and final rotation evaluations.

Another way to maximize preceptor feedback is to identify areas of strengths and weaknesses for preceptors to further help you refine. Be upfront and honest at the beginning of the rotation about what you are comfortable with and with what areas you need more experience. If your preceptor is aware of what experiences you desire, you are more likely to get those experiences. If there are opportunities available to help you grow and gain knowledge, ask your preceptor to make it happen.

The last way to maximize preceptor feedback is to learn how to accept criticism and use it for professional growth. With this, it is important and necessary to put feelings aside and not view criticism as a personal attack, but rather as a way to improve your pharmacy practice. Remember, your preceptor is not criticizing you as a person, they are critiquing your actions as a future pharmacist.

Recognize the potential

While every rotation will not directly connect with your future career goal, you should approach each rotation with a desire to gain a new skill, knowledge base, or refinement of your clinical reasoning process. Take advantage of as many learning opportunities as you can. Look for learning opportunities that connect to your future career goals to maximize a rotation you may not be initially interested in.

When on rotations, remember that pharmacy is a very, very small world. Be cognizant of the impression you are leaving on your preceptor, as he or she may be a critical professional connection for a residency site or future employer if you perform strongly.

Be authentic

Set expectations early in each rotation. It is important to have a clear vision of what you and your preceptor expect of each other. While your preceptor is donating his or her time, investment in your education during the rotation should be a priority. It is just as important for your preceptor to know your expectations. It will make the rotation go more smoothly. Be genuine with your preceptor, the other members of your health care team, and your patients.

Lastly, be you. While you need to maximize a rotation, don't pretend to love a practice area that you don't. Your preceptor will always appreciate a good attitude and desire to learn, but don't be insincere. Make sure to take in the opportunities offered to you on rotations and enjoy the experience!

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