

“What are some recommendations for advancing my teaching skills during residency?”

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You pose a very important question and one that applies to PGY1 and PGY2 residents equally. Most new practitioners and educators have had exactly the same question at some point as well, and I had the same question when I was completing my postgraduate training. Here you are, completing a competitive postgraduate training program that contains some teaching components and feeling proud of that accomplishment. Then you sit back and say, “Am I really ready to use this information?” Whether you are completing your last year of postgraduate training and about to be an autonomous pharmacist or looking to further advance yourself with a second year of residency, the good news is that there are definitely ways to enhance and fine-tune the skills you have been developing during your residency teaching.

When it comes to teaching and the pharmacy educational environment, I often think about one of my favorite quotes from University of Alabama head football coach Paul “Bear” Bryant: “It’s not the will to win that matters ... everyone has that. It’s the will to prepare to win that matters.” The “win,” in this case, is being effective in the classroom or in the experiential setting with pharmacy students and/or residents. Part of the “will to prepare” is taking advantage of every opportunity that comes your way during residency. That you are asking this question about advancing your skills demonstrates that you already have that will to prepare to “win.” This may sound like it lacks value, but having the desire to improve and strengthen your skills is the most important step in advancing your abilities when it comes to being an effective educator. Without a will and a strong commitment, the chances of optimizing your skills decrease drastically. Just by posing this question, you have taken a vital first step.

My first recommendation is to take advantage of a residency teaching certificate program, if one exists in your area. Many regions offer such programs for residents throughout their area. These certificate programs are often available to both PGY1 and PGY2 residents, and ACCP has published guidelines strengthening and supporting them throughout the country.¹ These programs often offer education sessions for part of the year in which information on writing cases, quizzes, and exams; creating syllabi; precepting students; etc., is all included, which is subsequently applied to real students in the didactic or experiential setting. Many schools of pharmacy look for applicants who have completed such programs. These hands-on experiences can be invaluable. If such an opportunity exists, I strongly encourage taking advantage of it. A question that commonly arises is, “I completed a teaching certificate in my PGY1 but have now moved to a different part of the country for my PGY2; should I enroll in their program?” My answer is “absolutely.” There are many benefits from seeing and learning from different educators and institutions. Some of the most successful teachers use bits and pieces of information they have picked up along the way during their career. I believe this a great way to benefit from a different environment/experience during your PGY2 residency.

Although teaching experiences and responsibilities may be natural for some positions, they are not as natural for other positions. At any position or point in your career, you can seek out opportunities to interact with students. Schools of pharmacy are always looking for adjunct faculty to deliver a lecture, lead a discussion group, perform assessments, or precept students. These are great opportunities to

practice your teaching abilities even if you aren't in a direct teaching position. Get involved and be hands-on with teaching and educating the future leaders of the profession!

There is no substitute for experience, and mentoring can be invaluable. Many institutions have some form of a mentoring program available and will assign a mentor or mentors to mentees. If your institution engages in such a process, accept it with open arms. If it doesn't, there is no need to fret. Seek out a mentor. This can be one individual or even multiple individuals who align well with the various types of teaching in which you are engaging students. If you don't feel comfortable with the traditional one-on-one mentor-mentee relationship, think about developing a group of mentees who are in a similar situation. Often, having two or more individuals in your same situation and finding a mentor for these individuals can enhance idea sharing and the group's overall comfort level. This can place additional workload on the mentor, but often, that person enjoys interacting with a greater number of people. When setting up a mentoring relationship or relationships, it is important to remember that time is of the essence. The earlier these interactions are developed, the more likely positive outcomes and effective overall mentoring experiences will emerge. Subsequently, this will maximize the intent of mentoring to enhance your teaching abilities.

Establishing a mentoring relationship with an individual at your institution who has experience in the area in which you are hoping to advance your skills opens up endless opportunities. That mentor can share previous experiences (positive and negative), offer tips, review materials, observe teaching skills, and complete evaluations. These are just a few examples; don't limit yourself to these. In addition, don't sit back and wait for these to happen or for your mentor to offer assistance. Consider preemptively scheduling sessions to discuss these items and ensure that they take place. This will help with your schedule, but your mentor will also likely appreciate the proactive approach you are taking to ensure the success of the mentoring relationship.

Because you are not alone in your search to expand your teaching skills, many training institutes and professional development programs are available. One specifically that has helped numerous new pharmacy educators is the ACCP Teaching and Learning Academy, which has two distinct advantages. First, it requires you to identify a mentor at the beginning, which establishes the relationship described earlier. Second, it requires you to complete your assignments along the way through a portfolio. You are learning and advancing skills beyond your teaching certificate, both didactic and experiential, during the in-person and online sessions, and are subsequently using this information to create materials such as course syllabi, lecture outlines, and teaching philosophy statements. The Academy creates an environment for networking with individuals, who, like you, are seeking to advance their teaching skills.

In all avenues of professional development, networking can be important to growth, including growth in your teaching abilities. One networking tool that I have found helpful is the ACCP Education and Training Practice and Research Network (PRN). This PRN creates a forum for addressing academic issues related to education and training. Networking at the ACCP Annual Meeting through this PRN can drastically enhance your teaching abilities. Another perk of networking through this PRN is the interaction with students that comes with it. Many students are members of the PRN and are looking to interact with individuals like you, who have graduated recently from pharmacy school. At the Annual Meeting, the PRN hosts mock interviews for students looking to obtain postgraduate training. By volunteering to conduct mock interviews, you are immediately interacting with students and beginning to engage in mentoring them, an important facet for any teaching position. Don't be afraid to use the PRN e-mail list to reach out to fellow members to seek or provide information throughout the year.

From the beginning, know that things won't be perfect. Having realistic expectations for your first lecture, first Advanced Pharmacy Practice Experience (APPE) students, or first resident learning experience will help you keep your perspective. No one has had the perfect rotation or perfect lecture right after obtaining their teaching certificate or completing the Teaching and Learning Academy. In fact, I would argue that no one has ever had the perfect rotation or lecture. It's not how your first experiences go with teaching; it's what changes to your skills and abilities you make along the way. Perform regular self-assessment and use mentor, peer, and student evaluations to enhance your abilities. Be careful not to take all student evaluations to heart, but look for evaluations with themes and reasonable suggestions for change.

Whether you're a PGY1 resident who just obtained your Pharm.D. degree or a PGY2 resident looking for your first position after training, the opportunities to advance yourself are endless. Residency programs are seeking to produce tomorrow's pharmacy educators, and organizations like ACCP are committed to your success. Seek out experiences to enhance your skills, and jump at these opportunities when they arise. We have all been there at some point, and you will only gain respect from others for trying to make yourself better for the benefit of tomorrow's students. The best educators in the country are the ones who have done exactly the same thing. Remember, it's not how your first teaching experience goes. Rather, it's what you do along the way through mentoring, professional development programs, networking, student engagement, and consistent evaluation to make yourself better. It's not the will to "win," it's the preparing, changing, and constant enhancing of your abilities to "win" that matters.

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Reference

1. Havrda DE, Engle JP, Anderson KC, et al. Guidelines for resident teaching experiences. *Pharmacotherapy* 2013;33:147e-161e.