

Pharmacy Student Forum

Finding and working with mentors

Pharmacy students can face many challenging decisions throughout their journey. What student organizations are best to join? Is it wise to have a job during the school year? How important is doing research? What about applying for a residency? What's the best way to prepare for the future? How can one get involved in pharmacy leadership? How can time be managed efficiently? These questions are commonly asked by pharmacy students, and the answers will differ for each student depending on his or her interests, goals, and aspirations. A mentor is vital for helping guide students down an appropriate path that meets their individual needs. White¹ noted that 44.6% of pharmacy students reported not having a mentor, meaning that almost half of the surveyed students did

not reap the benefits of mentorship. The most common reasons students cited for not having a mentor included never thinking about it, not knowing how to find one, and not knowing the benefits of a mentor. Pharmacy students should understand the importance of identifying and acquiring a mentor.

A mentor can be described as a wise and trusted counselor—someone who teaches, assists, and advises a less-experienced person. A mentor has the experience to guide students down their chosen paths and to provide honest advice about real or potential obstacles. Mentors should have a vested interest in their students' successes and serve as a support system when those students stumble. A student's personal and professional devel-

opment can be enhanced when a mentor provides direction and insight regarding goals, fosters self-confidence, instills professional values, lends emotional support and encouragement, and enhances networking and leadership opportunities.^{2,3} Leadership is viewed as a professional



obligation of all pharmacists, and mentors have an important role in motivating students to develop these skills.¹

A successful mentor–student relationship allows both participants to gain from the interaction, but the student will benefit the most.⁴ This relationship evolves over time, making the alliance different from a preceptor–student or an advisor–student relationship. Pairings of students with preceptors or advisors are

often prearranged, whereas mentors are chosen by students.² Despite this difference, it is not uncommon for students to identify preceptors or advisors as their mentors. Having the chance to build and foster a close relationship with a professional expert and role model provides students with opportunities and insights that they may not have had otherwise.

One of the most valuable assets of having a mentor is the continual encouragement and support that he or she can provide. Therefore, an ideal mentor would have professional roles and specialties that align with the student's interests, have a genuine concern for the student's success, and be willing to provide honest advice and feedback.

It is never too early in a pharmacy student's journey to start thinking about mentorship. The first step in successfully identifying a mentor is to think of individuals—whether they are faculty members, employers, or preceptors—whom one admires or looks up to.² The focus should be on finding someone who has a background of experiences and interests that aligns with the student's goals and interests. Students should look for mentors who have their best interest at heart, are easy to get along and converse with, and are understanding and supportive. At-

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The Pharmacy Student Forum column features articles that address the unique needs of students throughout school as they transition into new practitioners. Authors include students and others with expertise in a topic of interest to students. AJHP readers are invited to submit topics or articles for this column to the Pharmacy Student Forum, c/o Diana Dabdub, 7272 Wisconsin Avenue, Bethesda, MD 20814 (301-664-8854 or students@ashp.org).

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tending local, state, and national pharmacy meetings is a great way to start identifying potential mentors and provides excellent opportunities to establish mentoring relationships. Students may be apprehensive about approaching possible mentors who appear to be too busy to commit to a true mentoring relationship, but most pharmacy faculty members, employers, and preceptors would be honored to serve in this capacity. Students may want to have separate mentors to assist with the different components of their personal and professional development. For example, one mentor might be a pharmacy specialist in the area of the student's primary interest who can foster networking opportunities, and another mentor might be a faculty member who helps develop the student's leadership skills and enhance his or her work-life balance.

ASHP Connect has an outstanding program that can help identify an ideal mentor.⁵ Other programs may be available to students through their respective pharmacy schools, state pharmacy organizations, or other national pharmacy organization mentoring service.

Mentors can help light the way to career goals, instill professionalism, provide encouragement, and open opportunities for networking and leadership. Having one or more mentors is a vital component of a pharmacy student's professional journey.

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