



Short communication

Customizing student learning during Advanced Pharmacy Practice Experiences

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Abstract

Background/introduction: While there is information on the incorporation of remediation into classroom curricula, there has been little discussion in the literature about the application of specific remediation techniques within experiential learning in pharmacy programs.

Rationale and objectives: The purpose of developing remediation processes and an early warning system for students on Advanced Pharmacy Practice Experiences (APPEs) is to help identify and monitor students who are struggling in a particular area, as well as provide additional support and training when needed that will prevent students from getting to the maximum number of rotation retakes.

Methods: There are three areas of monitoring that preceptors can recommend: professionalism, time management, and communication. Also, preceptors can indicate if the student needs additional help in therapeutic knowledge or drug information skills. These areas are targeted because they are the most common ones identified by preceptors in student evaluations during previous years. Once a student is officially referred for monitoring, the student enters into a performance improvement plan created by the Director of Experiential Education.

Significant findings: During the 2013–2014 academic year, the on-time graduation using the developed remediation plan was seven of eight students (88%) and the overall graduation success rate was eight of eight students (100%). Since May 2014, there have been a total of four students referred for monitoring and additional help by the Experiential Education Office (EEO) and student learning center. During the first quarter of the academic year, there were no failures of APPEs.

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Background/introduction

Criteria and policies for remediation are a requirement for Colleges of Pharmacy as defined in the Accreditation Council for Pharmacy Education (ACPE) Professional Standards for Accreditation.¹ The purpose of student

remediation is to improve specific knowledge and/or skills with the goal of preventing dismissal from the program. Remediation approaches for the didactic portion of the curriculum may include retaking a specific course or repeating an entire semester or year in the professional program.¹ Essential components of remediation include early identification of performance problems, incorporation of activities directed at improving the student's approach to learning, and encouragement of self-directed learning.² While there is information about the incorporation of remediation into classroom curricula, there has been little

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discussion in the literature about the application of specific remediation techniques within experiential learning in pharmacy programs.

In a 2012 survey sent to accredited United States colleges of pharmacy, 20 of the 30 programs that responded had a remediation process in place for Advanced Pharmacy Practice Experiences (APPEs). Of the 20 schools who have a remediation process, ten schools (50%) allowed students to repeat one rotation, four schools (20%) allowed two rotations to be repeated, one school (5%) allowed up to four repeated rotations, and five schools (25%) described their process as undecided or indicated that it varies (e.g., there is not a maximum number in the policy, and it is up to the Academic Progressions committee). Two of the colleges of pharmacy further defined that if a student fails more than the maximum number of rotations, the student is then expelled or dismissed from the program.³

The results of this study are similar to those reported in an article by Poirier and et al.⁴ that reviewed the academic progression and retention policies of colleges and schools of pharmacy related to remediation. A majority of the programs reviewed in the study (81.6%) did not have information on their website regarding academic performance during experiential learning (i.e., APPEs). Of the 19 programs that did address experiential learning in their academic and retention policies, the most common criterion for academic dismissal was failure of two APPEs.⁴

At Butler University College of Pharmacy and Health Sciences (BUCOPHS), students are required to complete ten four-week APPE rotations during their fourth professional year. Rotations are graded on a pass/fail system. The policy regarding remediation of rotations specifies that a student may receive a failing grade for not achieving an acceptable level of performance, for exhibiting unprofessional behavior, or for compromising patient safety during the course of the rotation. The student is then to be scheduled for a retake of the failed rotation with a Butler University faculty member. This may require that the repeated rotation occur after the current academic year is completed and may also require that the student complete remedial work prior to reassignment of the rotation, as determined by the Director of Experiential Education. If the student successfully meets expectations for the retake rotation, he/she will be allowed to continue in the program. The retake rotation assessment will replace the previously recorded failing assessment. If the student receives a failing grade in any two experiential pharmacy rotations, Introductory Pharmacy Practice Experience (IPPE) or APPE, the student will cease to progress, and the case will be referred to the college's Academic and Professional Affairs Committee for review under the guidelines of the Academic Progress Policy. A possible penalty from the Academic and Professional Affairs Committee is dismissal from the program.

Rationale and objectives

While most student learners who are on the borderline are ultimately able to achieve minimum competence, there

are a small number that continue to have performance deficiencies that prevent them from successfully progressing through the professional program.⁵ In order to prevent students from reaching the point of dismissal during their APPEs, the faculty and staff within the Experiential Education Office (EEO) felt there was a need to develop remediation processes and an early warning system. The purpose of adding these additional steps is to help identify and monitor students who are struggling in a particular area, as well as provide additional support and training when needed that will prevent students from getting to the maximum number of rotation retakes.

Preceptors are sometimes reluctant to fail students. A common reason cited for this by preceptors serving on the Experiential Continuous Quality Improvement committee at BUCOPHS is that preceptors feel they might negatively impact the student's future by delaying or preventing their graduation. Preceptors also question whether they are being "too hard" on the student if they have previously passed other rotations or have a high grade point average (GPA) in the didactic portion of the curriculum. By developing a remediation process, we have created another option for preceptors to consider for students who are on the border of a passing or failing grade/assessment. Having such a remediation process may help to provide preceptors with the assurance that the student will continue to receive the support and monitoring needed to be successful. Further, it may also enable preceptors to hold students more accountable to the rotation goals and objectives they have set.

Methods and materials (development of the remediation process)

An important step in the remediation process is early identification of the specific problems students encounter in the experiential setting.^{2,6,7} The midpoint evaluation is a tool that can be utilized for this purpose. The evaluation contains a plan of action that is to be created by the student and preceptor. It is intended to ensure that the student is aware of areas that need improvement and to also establish a plan for how to achieve the needed improvement by the end of the rotation. Concern cards are available through the online rotation management system and can be filled out by preceptors any time throughout the rotation to alert the Director of Experiential Education of potential behavioral or learning issues.

To help further improve the remediation process, the faculty within the EEO at BUCOPHS developed a section in our student evaluation form in which the preceptor can suggest longitudinal monitoring or remediation needed for the student (Figure 1). There are three areas of monitoring that preceptors can recommend: professionalism, time management, and communication. Preceptors can also indicate if the student needs further remediation in the following areas: therapeutic knowledge, drug information skills, time management/organization, and communication.

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