

Address for Paul F. Parker Award
December 4, 2001
Joseph T. DiPiro

Being honored with the Paul Parker Award is without a doubt one of the highlights of my career. It is a tremendous honor to be recognized by the UK residents past and present in the name of Paul Parker. I would like to thank all of you for being here today and I appreciate this opportunity to provide some personal reflections on the UK residency experience. In my brief comments I would like to talk about one aspect of the UK program that influenced me and continues to guide me in a very important role in my current position.

My Kentucky years have had a profound impact on my career in many ways. Many times over the years I have looked back to my Kentucky years to understand what was most valuable about them and to determine how I could create experiences just as valuable for my students and the young pharmacists who I have associated with. Clearly, the Kentucky experience was not just the clinical skills that were gained. More importantly, it was the people who you worked with and how they shaped what you learned.

I arrived at UK back in June 1978 straight from my BS program, and at that time it seemed to me that UK was at the center of the pharmacy universe. I am reminded now that 1978 was a long time ago because when I mention that year to my 4th year students they now say “that’s the year I was born.”

In 1978, I could not imagine that there was any other place that had as much to offer a clinical pharmacist in training. I remember being very impressed and motivated by the infectious enthusiasm of people like Tom Foster and Bob Rapp, the solid advice and guidance of Ann Amerson and John Butler, and the intellect and clear thinking of Bob Blouin and Ken Record.

As many of you know, one of the most valuable experiences at Kentucky was the chance to work with more senior residents. In my case, I had some of the best. In fact, in my first year, UK had over 40 pharmacy residents, from all over the country. I still have a picture on my wall of that 1978 group – the first thing you’d notice is that both Don Letendre and I had a full head of long hair. When you combine all of this personal interaction with the Pharm.D. courses we were required to take, working night shifts, code 500s, and volunteering for research studies on the weekends - we asked to be challenged and were not disappointed.

Over the years I have tried to figure out, as many of you probably have, what was it about Paul Parker that made him special in this mix of Kentucky people. Before coming to Lexington I had heard very little specifically about Paul and naively assumed he was a clinical guru. So, it was my surprise to find out in the first few months that he couldn’t dose gentamicin and didn’t have a clue as to the right cephalosporin to use. But he obviously had the right people in the right positions to accomplish what he wanted.

It was also fascinating to me that his roots went so deep into the history of hospital pharmacy, clinical pharmacy, and ASHP, and that this history was living in the time we were there - evidenced by the many national connections that we became a part of while at UK.

The many visits to UK Medical Center by pharmacists from around the country and the world, and the opportunities that we had to visit other places while on residency trips, made it very obvious to us early on of the value and necessity for that kind of face-to-face interchange of ideas. It is unfortunate that the present concerns with travel security could impede these exchanges and opportunities for professional growth.

One of the most important personal interactions was between Paul and his residents. We all know that Paul was always interested in guiding and mentoring his residents. At some point, all his residents would have heard him say [and I can’t come close to the voice] “You know, you

ought to think about doing this.." or "You ought to think about doing that...." - this at some decision point in our lives. So you would then have to think more about why you should or should not do what he suggested.

Overall, during the years that a resident was at UK, the actual words from Paul, as individually-directed advice were relatively few. And the act of giving advice alone didn't assure its value. But clearly, there was something in the timing that was very important. Paul recognized when people were at important decision points and were open to influence. Through this timing of what was usually good advice he could have the most positive influence on people's lives.

As my career progresses, I have come to highly value opportunities to have a positive influence on people and their careers - and I attribute this to Paul Parkers's influence on me. For many years I did not fully take advantage of these opportunities. But I have come to recognize that sometimes the smallest efforts - the few well chosen words at the right time - to a person open to influence - - can have a great effect.

Individuals are open to influence at times determined by their own agendas, however, it seems to me that most people in our world of pharmacy are more open at four key points in their education and careers. We who are educators, practitioners, or administrators should do more to recognize these few opportunities to influence people in their careers. For me, some of the major steps in my career began with a few words from people I respected:

- "You should consider going into pharmacy"
- "You should think about going to Kentucky"
- "Why don't you talk with the people at Georgia about their position"

For us, as mentors or advisers a first opportunity to influence a person's career comes when students enter college and are uncertain about a career direction. They may have very little

knowledge about pharmacy and are not sure if pharmacy will provide the kinds of challenges that they are seeking. What I have done on many occasions is invite these prospective students to spend a day with our clinical pharmacists - When they visit I know that they will come from away very enthusiastic about pharmacy as a profession. In these situations, a few words, the invitation to visit, can lead to major career choices.

A second critical point for guidance is the first year of pharmacy school. It is at this point that most students who are going into residencies first become interested. The few words “you know, you should really think about doing a residency” can open a whole new world. Also important is making the connection between these first-year pharmacy students and people who are in their residencies. Unfortunately, with our all-PharmD programs and increased class sizes we don't have the same kinds of one-to-one interactions with students that we once had. It is very important that we reestablish times to sit down and talk with first-year students outside of class.

A third opportunity is when a resident or new graduate is searching for their first job. I remember Paul Parker on a few occasions saying that it was a shame that we spend so many years in our education and training and then at the end have just a few short months to sort through job opportunities - there is so much pressure to have ‘a job’ or ‘some job’ by the time we are finished. But a few words from a senior person on what is important in a new job can lend perspective and insight to the job seeker.

At the start of a career it is very difficult to sort through the advantages and disadvantages of various positions to determine which factors will be most important a few short years down the road. Paul advised us not to pick a job just based on salary - that a successful career would bring the appropriate rewards. And he said that we should expect to be in our second job, even work toward a job change, after about three to five years.

Finally, there are many opportunities to influence people early in their professional careers.

When a person has been working hard in a position for a few years, as many people do, they look up and ask “where do I go from here?” or “whats next?” It is at this point that good advice and mentorship can move someone from simply “doing a good job” to building a career. A few words about job priorities, survival skills, or past lessons learned can be invaluable to the young professional. As others have said, one of the most important things early in a career is setting the stage for a person to have some key successes or achievements that result from their efforts— these early successes remove perceived barriers and can motivate long-term growth.

So again, our responsibility is to recognize these points, these times when young people are more open to influence and need our mentorship. To offer, at very least, the few words the few minutes that can make a difference.

I would like to recommend to you to a book that was published earlier this year titled “Making the Most of College” written by a Harvard professor, Richard Light. Dr. Light has made over a 10-year formal study of the factors that are associated with success in college. His work does not focus on Harvard, nor health professions, but provides a very broad view of what factors make a difference in college. What he has to say is applicable to our students and trainees, and is even useful for anyone who has a son or daughter in college. He demonstrates with his research that good quality advising does have a “positive and powerful impact” on lives.

In this advising process, the kinds of things that make a difference are: connecting with faculty, working with classmates in group projects rather than independent study, and receiving sound advice on choices of extra-curricular activities. He makes it clear that those few words at the right time can make all the difference for some students.

I know that I have benefited from such mentorship in my career, from Paul and many others at UK, at the University of Connecticut, and at the University of Georgia where I have been fortunate to be for the past 20 years.

In some ways my UK residency has never ended. When I started at UK I was told it was a three-year commitment, but for me the program has gone on much longer. I still work on a daily basis with former UK residents, Rusty May and George Francisco. It is a rare gift to have people like them to work with through thick and thin over all these years.

I am very grateful to my wife Cecily, who is a practicing clinical pharmacist, and my three children for all their support. And I wish to thank all of my colleagues at the University of Georgia and the Medical College of Georgia, and the Deans that I have worked for at Georgia - Howard Ansel, Stuart Feldman, and Svein Oie.