Pharmacy resident recruitment as a practical learning experience for current residents

A 2004 study identified resident recruitment as the most important and challenging issue facing pharmacy residency programs. Many residency sites do not have preceptors dedicated full-time to the support of the residency’s programs, and there is an increasing need to integrate as many individuals as possible, including residents and additional preceptors, into the recruitment process. Resident involvement in the recruitment process may provide many benefits to the resident, the residency candidate, the preceptors, and the program.

We have developed a recruitment process that maximizes resident input while imparting upon residents valuable leadership skills. Our residency program operates within a 473-bed academic medical center with a level 1 trauma center, a cancer center, an integrated pediatric hospital, and an extensive outpatient clinic system. Generally, a total of 15 pharmacy residents annually participate in either postgraduate year 1 (PGY1) or year 2 (PGY2 [ambulatory care, critical care, oncology, infectious diseases, internal medicine, pediatrics]) programs. All residents participate in PGY1 recruitment, as many PGY2 residents are graduates of our PGY1 program and therefore have a desire to contribute to the recruitment of their future colleagues, and all can learn from actively participating in a large employee-search approach. The following plan, which primarily focuses on the recruitment of PGY1 residents, parallels the ASHP-suggested “Residency Checklist” that candidates follow throughout their selection process and “ASHP Guidelines on the Recruitment, Selection, and Retention of Pharmacy Personnel.”

Publicizing the program. Each fall, our website containing job descriptions for prospective residents (www.mc.uky.edu/pharmacy/residency/) and the ASHP Midyear Clinical Meeting (MCM) Residency Showcase materials are updated by a committee of residents, with input from the residency program director (RPD) and preceptors. At the MCM, residents, preceptors, and the RPD participate in the Residency Showcase, and all prospective candidates are invited to a reception hosted by the institution and the affiliated college of pharmacy. This reception allows residents, preceptors, and candidates a more informal setting for interaction and fosters networking skills for both residents and candidates, as they will become future colleagues, regardless of residency placement.

Screening process. In the weeks after the MCM Residency Showcase, residents and the RPD review submitted applications to determine candidates’ suitability for an interview. Using a standardized scoring form, residents work in pairs to review applications. After the initial review, a meeting...
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of residents and the RPD is convened to discuss each applicant and identify the candidates to whom an invitation for an onsite interview will be extended. Generally, 21–24 applicants are invited for an interview, approximately three times the number of positions being sought. The limited number of applicants allows the RPD to focus on only the most qualified candidates while recognizing the additional workload of conducting onsite interviews. Interviews are held on Mondays and Fridays, most commonly involving three applicants each day. Candidates invited for interviews are personally contacted by a current resident to schedule an onsite interview.

Coordination of each interview day is delegated to a team of two residents, but every resident is directly involved with each interview day. Interview coordinators contact applicants to confirm travel arrangements, establish transportation throughout the candidate’s visit, and arrange lodging. A unique aspect of our program is that applicants are encouraged to stay with a current resident during the visit. This opportunity provides applicants a cost-saving alternative to lodging and a more in-depth perspective of life as a resident. The evening before their interview, candidates are invited to have a casual dinner with the RPD and an assortment of residents and preceptors. This experience helps put candidates at ease before their interview day and allows for in-depth exposure to interactions among the RPD, preceptors, and residents.

The interview. “A successful interview process is one that matches the best available candidate with a specific position. The process should allow the interviewers to predict the future performance of candidates as accurately as possible.”

The interview day at our institution commences with breakfast with residents and preceptors, followed by formal overviews of the site, program, and facilities from the director of pharmacy and RPD. The remainder of the morning consists of brief synopses of rotation opportunities by all preceptors and a tour of the institution with a current resident. Depending on the weekday of the interview, candidates attend one of two activities integral to resident life, either the program’s weekly resident meeting or pharmacy grand rounds. During the afternoon, each candidate participates in three 20-minute interviews conducted by teams of residents and preceptors. The team approach to interviewing fosters the idea of teamwork in the interviewees and provides a means to

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assess their ability to communicate within a group as detailed by ASHP guidelines. Each team asks every candidate several standard questions, in addition to any relevant items of discussion, that allow the team to compare the candidates and provide an overall rating of each candidate (1 = unacceptable and 10 = highly acceptable). The day concludes with a resident roundtable discussion and wrap-up with the RPD.

**Rank list construction.** At the close of each interview day, residents discuss their impressions of each candidate and his or her compatibility with the program. Upon completion of the interviews, residents gather to prepare a rank list. An overall candidate assessment, based on application and interview scores and general impressions, is then made, categorizing applicants as highly desirable, desirable, acceptable, or unacceptable. Candidates are then ranked within each of these groups, and the groups are then combined to construct a rank list for consideration by the preceptors and RPD. The chief resident attends a meeting with this group to represent resident rankings and, when needed, provide the rationale behind the residents’ decisions regarding a candidate’s rank. After the deliberations by the preceptors and RPD, alterations to the final list are noted and ultimately forwarded to the RPD and pharmacy director for review and final submission to the ASHP Resident Matching Program.

**Discussion.** The degree to which residents are involved in the recruitment process at our institution provides multiple advantages to all those involved—the candidate, the program, and the current resident. The candidates are given broad exposure to the current residents and their daily life and responsibilities. Informal opportunities for resident interaction, including housing by a current resident, dinner, breakfast, and a roundtable discussion, help candidates feel comfortable asking questions. Candidates often cite these experiences as the highlights of their site visit.

Resident involvement in the recruitment process also confers multiple advantages to the program and its preceptors. Division of tasks among residents allows for more positive interactions between the preceptors and candidates with minimal preceptor absence from clinical responsibilities. Allowing each preceptor to meet the candidates is also beneficial when reviewing the final rank list. Residents’ intimate involvement in the recruitment process strengthens collegial relationships between residents and preceptors. Having both parties function nearly equally in the interview and decision-making processes fosters a stronger preceptor–resident bond.

While the benefits that candidates and the program receive are numerous, residents receive excellent human resource experience opportunities by participating in the recruitment process. Recruitment activities complement concepts introduced during the pharmacy practice management rotation, including exposure to the activities associated with recruiting and interviewing. Residents develop an understanding of the kind of information that needs to be conveyed during an interview, the appropriate structure for a site visit, and the appropriate mechanisms for evaluating candidates. Recruitment activities are an exciting tradition that engage residents and instill excitement about the opportunity to orient and mentor the incoming class. Finally, the residents’ involvement in the recruitment process provides a greater appreciation of the program’s reputation and overall strengths.

**Conclusion.** Resident involvement in the recruitment process proves to be beneficial to all parties involved, including the candidate, the current resident, and the preceptor. Candidates receive an open and honest account of the program, and residents gain experience in recruiting and selecting future residents and other practical skills to integrate into their professional roles.


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