Remote Teaching: A Preceptor's Perspective

by Julie Pawola PharmD

Abstract

Remote precepting can be a rewarding experience. Because the need for remote experience will continue into the future, it is essential for preceptors to:

- Determine the best learning model for both the student and the preceptor
- Outline and prepare rotation activities in advance
- View all rotations as continuous quality improvement projects
- Constantly share successes and opportunities for improvement with colleagues

At the end of July 2020, I started to outline our team's teaching plan for the 2020-2021 school year and realized that two fourth-year pharmacy students had signed up for our pharmacy informatics elective rotation. I brainstormed how to successfully precept students while working remotely with my own two school-aged children at home. I met with a pharmacist colleague who had recently completed a remote rotation. This meeting was invaluable for helping me learn the keys to success and begin to formulate ideas about what a remote rotation could look like.

My chosen profession comes with a commitment to lifelong learning, so I sought out resources to determine what information was available to advise preceptors in a remote setting. I contacted the Experiential Education Program office at the University of Wisconsin-Madison School of Pharmacy, and the education and development coordinator in our department to identify resources. As an active member of the American Society of Health System Pharmacists (ASHP), I also investigated the resources that were available through my professional pharmacy organization. I used the following resources to get practical suggestions for how to be a successful remote preceptor.

1. ASHP podcast: *From the Frontline of COVID-19: Managing Remote Rotations*[1]
2. ASHP webinar series: *Innovative Teaching and Learning Models in the COVID-19 Era: Parts I & II*[2]
3. University of California at San Francisco: *Best Practices for Remote Learning*[3]
4. Journal of the Pharmacy Society of Wisconsin: *I am a Pharmacy Professional and a… Virtual Teacher*[4]

The first decision that needs to be made with remote teaching is to determine the learning model of the rotation: completely in person, hybrid, or virtual only. My team was already working remotely, the COVID-19 cases in my area were continuing to rise, and for personal reasons, I needed to remain at home. I communicated to the School of Pharmacy and to the student scheduled for the rotation that it would be offered as a completely remote experience. The major limitation of this model was that the student would not have access to our electronic medical record (EMR) or to the files that are available on our internal network. However, our management team provided an opportunity for the student to work at either the pharmacy services building or an office building if I deemed this access was necessary. I felt that the objectives of a pharmacy informatics rotation could easily be accomplished in a completely remote learning model, unlike the significant challenges of completing an inpatient clinical rotation virtually.

Prior to starting the rotation, I outlined the experience and began with the following quote: "The only constant in life is change," by Heraclitus. Based on feedback from my colleague, I decided to schedule a "virtual office" with the student every morning for one hour and every afternoon for 30 minutes. The morning touch-base served as time for didactic teaching, while the afternoon touch-base provided the student with an opportunity to ask questions about the meetings we attended during the day or the projects that we were working on. This time also allowed us to review the plans for the next day. I made the decision that these virtual hours would be conducted with cameras on to provide for personal interaction. I allocated activities for the required 240 hours that the student had to complete, which included introductory videos to watch during the first week, two potential larger rotation projects, weekly journal articles for us to review, and a number of smaller projects that the student could work on.

During the rotation, I used Google Drive functionality to share journal and reference documents with the student, and Google Docs to share the rotation overview and daily informatics touch-base documents. WebEx technology was used to provide the student with the opportunity to interact with the EMR, and to learn how build is completed within it. Our pharmacy department uses the layered learning model to assist residents in enhancing their precepting skills. To incorporate this model in the remote environment, our informatics PGY-2 resident participated in our weekly journal club discussions, evaluated the student's journal club presentation, and completed his major project evaluation. I viewed this rotation as a continuous quality improvement project. On a weekly basis, we reviewed our perspectives of what was going right with the rotation and what could be improved, along with how the improvements could be implemented. For example, I realized the need to outline our didactic topic discussions on a weekly basis to allow myself and the student adequate time to prepare for them. Also, I found different resources to increase the student's exposure to pharmacy informatics. In the middle of the rotation, I felt like I might have been overwhelming the student with things to do, so I communicated a prioritized list to him and started to classify different activities as "Must Be Done" and

"Nice To Accomplish." Finally, at the end of the day when I completed a review of my children's virtual school, I extended my review time to include my student's accomplishments for the day to ensure he was on track to successfully complete the rotation.

For the remainder of the academic year, I am scheduled to precept a PGY-1 resident and PGY-2 informatics resident, and plan to use some of the above precepting strategies. I will have video-on morning touch-bases with them for didactic teaching, and afternoon check-ins to ensure that their rotation goals and objectives are being met and provide them with the opportunity to ask questions. I will be asking the resident to evaluate the rotation on a weekly basis to determine how to improve their experience. I will also continue to seek out different resources to enhance my remote precepting skills. During the resident rotations, however, I will not require them to document their end-of-the-day accomplishments, and since both residents are employees, access to the EMR and files within the internal network will not be an obstacle.

The COVID-19 pandemic has challenged pharmacists in both their professional and personal lives. I was initially hesitant about precepting a remote rotation. However, I was satisfied overall with how my first remote pharmacy informatics rotation turned out. I believe there are adequate resources available for pharmacists to plan and prepare for remote teaching. However, it is important to communicate the rotation format up front so students can prepare, and to be sure that they both want to and are able to complete it. Outlining the rotation in advance is a necessary step to ensure the student has a successful learning experience, while highlighting that plans might need to change to meet the needs of your job responsibilities and the student's interest.

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