

University of Maryland School of Pharmacy

Standards of Conduct for

Professional Pharmacy Students

Introduction

The professional practice experiences you gain through the school's curriculum are a key ingredient in your education. These experiences, often called rotations or clerkships, provide an opportunity to apply the theoretical knowledge you have gained and to learn new skills that will serve you throughout your career. Each rotation will be unique. Like any experience, some rotations will meet your expectations and bring you a great deal of satisfaction and others will not. There are lessons to be learned on EVERY rotation. It is your responsibility to meet the goals of the rotation. Learning is an active process.

Your activities while on rotation will be supervised by a preceptor. Preceptor faculty are highly motivated and committed individuals who give their time for your education. They are also busy professionals with a great many responsibilities. You should be mindful of the demands you place on your preceptor's time and should be willing to assist them when possible.

Your conduct while on rotation is a reflection of you and the University of Maryland School of Pharmacy. You should reflect on how your behavior and image will influence what people think about you. Patients, their families, and other health care professionals will judge your ability to provide care based on the visual and verbal clues they receive from you. Knowledge and skill are not easily seen or measured. Things such as dress, grooming, language, and communication style often are the primary means by which people make initial judgments about you. Developing a professional image can enhance your competence and confidence.

Reporting for the First Day

The first day on each rotation is very important. Call your preceptor at least ten (10) days prior to the beginning of the rotation to introduce yourself and set up your initial schedule. Inquire about parking and transportation. You are expected to be on time for all meetings, discussion sessions, and appointments. If you are unavoidably delayed, you must call the preceptor as soon as it becomes apparent that you will be late.

On your first day, you should become familiar with your new surroundings. Be sure to ask your preceptor what your specific responsibilities are. Will you be working with others? When and how often will you be meeting with the preceptor? What are you expect to do at each meeting? Are there required readings? How can you reach the preceptor if needed? Do you need a special ID badge? Inquire about access to patient information (e.g., charts and records). Do you need a password for computer access? Are there any institution specific policies and procedures that you must follow?

Demonstrating Professionalism

You are becoming a professional. In return for the power and prestige bestowed upon them by society, professionals are expected to meet certain norms of behavior. These include competence, integrity, a caring attitude, and a friendly personality. The public also expects professionals to maintain high standards of dress, language, and hygiene.

Competence is achieved through daily application of the knowledge and skills you have learned. It requires a personal commitment to life-long learning, continually upgrading and updating your knowledge and skill. Passing the state licensure exam does not assure competence. Being able to meet the needs of the patients you encounter throughout your career makes you competent. Effectively solving problems and accurately answering questions make you competent. Fulfilling your professional role as a pharmacist makes you competent.

Personal and professional integrity is essential for forming trusting relationships with patients and colleagues. A professional keeps promises, respects others, and takes responsibility for his/her actions. Like competence, integrity is an essential ingredient to become an effective pharmacist. If others lack faith or trust in your recommendations, you will not be very effective, regardless of how knowledgeable you may be.

Health care professionals are expected to demonstrate a caring attitude toward patients. You can show that you care about the welfare of others by actively listening and by your willingness to put forth the effort whenever needed. Pharmaceutical care means taking responsibility for drug therapy outcomes. You should be committed to providing drug treatments that will optimally meet the needs of each patient. Taking responsibility means accepting blame for a negative drug therapy outcome, acknowledging missed opportunities to provide better drug therapy, and taking credit for a job well done.

While the old adage says "You should never judge a book by its cover," people will make judgments about you based on your appearance. For this reason, your attire should be in good taste and appropriate for the practice setting. This is not to say that your clothing should be devoid of your personality and style. However, overly revealing or provocative clothing is inappropriate in a professional environment. Casual clothing, such as blue jeans and shorts, should be worn during your off hours not on rotation. Men should wear ties. In most patient care areas, a white lab jacket should be worn to help patients identify you are a health care professional. You must wear a name badge. Your clothing should be clean and neatly pressed. Your shoes should complement your outfit. Although comfortable, sneakers are not appropriate. Avoid high heeled shoes as you may be on your feet for prolonged periods of time.

For obvious social reasons, personal hygiene and grooming is also important for your professional image. Again, while personal expression is the spice of life, highly unusual grooming or accessories may be distracting or overwhelming for some patients. For this reason, you should avoid exotic hair styles, heavy fragrances, exceedingly long fingernails, and excessively large pieces of jewelry.

The manner in which you communicate with others is another element of professionalism. The language you use must be appropriate for the audience to whom you are speaking. When speaking to patients, avoid medical jargon or overly complicated terminology. When speaking with other health care providers, use technical terms and phrases when appropriate but don't use medical lingo if you are unclear of its meaning. Conversations about specific patients should not be overheard by others not involved in the patient's care. Avoid talking about patients in public areas, such as hallways, the cafeteria, elevators, or pharmacy.

aisles. During meetings, don't hold personal conversations while professional discussions are occurring.

Always listen actively. Hear what others are really asking and saying. Before answering a question posed to you, never be afraid to ask questions to gather more information and clarify issues. Don't be afraid to say, "I don't know." Know your limitations and the scope of your responsibilities. Convey potentially frightening information in a sensitive but straightforward manner. Profane or derogatory language is very inappropriate in professional settings.

Show respect for others by using their appropriate titles. When speaking to patients, address them by their surname (Mr., Mrs., Ms.) unless the patient grants you permission to address them otherwise. Further, unless instructed otherwise, you should address your co-workers and preceptors by their surnames and formal titles.

Taking Responsibility

You are expected to take personal responsibility for your actions during your professional practice experiences through the school of pharmacy. However, your preceptor is **legally accountable** for your actions. Before you take any action, you must have your preceptor's permission to do so. You should be very clear as to what activities your preceptor allows you to perform independently (with indirect supervision) and what activities requires his/her presence or explicit involvement. As your ability and confidence grows, your preceptor may grant you greater freedom to make decisions on your own. You should take this greater freedom very seriously as your preceptor remains ultimately accountable for the actions you take. If you have any doubts as to what actions you should take or what information you should provide, talk to your preceptor first.

Handling Conflicts

Conflicts are inevitable. Some individuals may not treat you with respect. Some may not consider you a contributing member of the health care team. Some may make too many demands on your time. Others may have unreasonable expectations of your ability to perform certain tasks given your level of training and experience. Sometimes you may feel that your education is being short changed because you are not receiving enough guidance. These conflicts will occur throughout your professional career. Learning how to handle these situations is an important part of experiential learning.

If you have a disagreement with a preceptor or a co-worker, discuss the issue in private, not in front of patients or colleagues. Initiate the discussion with a clear mind, not when you are angry or upset. State the reasons for your concern in a non-judgment way. Be prepared to offer a solution(s) to the problem.

If the conflict is not resolved by a direct intervention with the involved individual(s), you should seek outside help. Sometimes asking a colleague or co-worker for advice, assistance, or reassurance is enough. Other times it is necessary to involve your preceptor, the coursemaster, or a supervisor. Approach them only after carefully considering your options and potential solutions. Hopefully you will learn from each situation including how you might prevent similar conflicts from occurring in the future.

Confidentiality

You have an ethical and legal obligation to keep patient information confidential. This includes seemingly innocuous information such as the names of medications or that the patient has been admitted to the hospital. You should have the patient's permission to discuss health related matters in front of or with family members and friends. The patient's medical records (including prescriptions) should never be copied unless the patient has granted you authority to do so.

If you discuss the patient's case with colleagues who are not involved in the patient's care, you should use initials and not the patient's full name. The identity of the patient should be obscured on all documents you place in your portfolio.

Health Issues

If you have a potential communicable illness, it is your responsibility to protect the health of your patients and the other members of the community (including co-workers). Some illnesses that are only a minor risk to young, healthy individuals may be life threatening to debilitated and elderly patients. Once the disease has been diagnosed, you should be aware of the procedures that should be followed to prevent its transmission. To control the spread of infectious disease, many Institutions have specific policies and procedures, often called **Universal Precautions**, that should be followed at all times. At a minimum, regardless of practice site, you should:

- C Wash hands thoroughly with a liquid or antimicrobial soap after each patient contact.
- C Wear latex gloves whenever there is a risk of nonsterile contact (i.e., contact with blood or a body fluid) with a patient or specimen. Discard used gloves after each patient contact. Wash hands after discarding gloves.
- C Wear a gown if there is a risk of blood or body fluids splashing.
- C Wear a mask and protective eye wear during procedures where a splash or aerosolization of blood or body fluids is likely to occur.
- C Follow the proper isolation techniques (often disease specific) if a patient is placed in isolation.
- C Do not recap needles.
- C Dispose of all syringes and needles in a sharps container.
- C Contact employee or student health if you develop diarrhea or a rash of unknown etiology or if you have an open skin lesion or weeping dermatitis.

It is the policy of the University of Maryland at Baltimore to provide care to all persons. No student will be permitted to refuse to care for an assigned patient in the absence of special circumstances that place the student at increased risk of an infectious disease. Any student who refuses to treat or serve an assigned patient will be subject to suspension or dismissal.

Academic Integrity

Students who engage in academic dishonesty will receive an F in the course and will be eligible for academic dismissal. During experiential rotations, the following are considered academic dishonesty:

Cheating - using unauthorized notes, study aids, or information from another individual.

Plagiarism - submitting work or ideas that, in part or in whole, are not the student's own without attributing credit to the source(s).

Fabrication - submitting data that was not actually gathered or was gathered by means outside the appropriate methods of collecting and generating data.

Falsification - altering documents or forging signatures.

Aiding or abetting dishonesty - providing material or information to another student with the knowledge that it will be used for the purposes of academic dishonesty.

Additional Readings

Furlow TW. Clinical etiquette: a critical primer. JAMA 1988; 260: 2558-9.

Code of Ethics for Pharmacists. American Pharmaceutical Association, 1994.

Acknowledgment

Much of this document has been adapted from:

Hazebrook L. Standards of professional conduct in patient care areas. Clinical Pharmacy Practice Manual. University of Wisconsin, School of Pharmacy.