

LETTERS

Response to “Not All Hard Work Leads to Learning”

To the Editor. In their letter, “Not all hard work leads to learning,” Persky and colleagues highlighted the need to teach students how to learn if they are to live up to the demands of a graduate-level pharmacy program and a successful life after graduation. As a recent pharmacy school graduate who struggled until being taught how to learn, I whole-heartedly agree that while learning takes hard work, “not all hard work leads to learning.”

Pharmacy students are expected to function at a higher level of learning than ever before and their previously successful learning strategies may no longer work for them. While this mismatch can result in less meaningful learning for many students, some may adopt new learning styles that allow them to be more successful. Speaking from experience, the process of adapting without direction is a slow, inefficient, and often painful process, such that even adaptable students spend more time spinning their wheels in trial and error than would be necessary if there had been an initial nudge in the right direction.

This pattern mentioned by Persky and colleagues became even more evident to me through my tutoring and peer mentoring responsibilities. A small minority of the dozens of students I worked with actually needed help understanding concepts. Instead, most students wanted to be taught how to learn efficiently. A few of these students knew what their learning styles were and this awareness enabled them to succeed after a brief discussion on how to apply their learning styles to curriculum requirements. Those who lacked this knowledge had to

settle for using their old study habits even when alternative approaches would have better served.

I benefitted from some direction at the start of my second year of pharmacy school, which made an immense difference. This direction came in the form of a learning styles workshop presented to our class. Prior to the workshop, we were directed to take an online learning styles test and bring our results to the session. The workshop began with a brief lecture defining different learning styles and some learning strategies that complemented each style. After the lecture, the students were divided into groups of similar learners where we shared studying strategies that did or did not work for us. The session was especially beneficial because our learning styles had been pre-identified to maximize impact and relevance of the lecture. A collaborative learning atmosphere was cultivated by providing an opportunity to learn from our peers. In the short span of 1 hour, I gained the knowledge to make the learning process more efficient and successful. This enabled me to devote much more time to professional and community service activities, while maintaining a high grade point average. Teaching incoming pharmacy students how to learn requires minimal effort from educators and has the potential for a big payoff in successful graduates who are better prepared for life-long learning.

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REFERENCES

1. Persky AM, Alford EL, Kyle J. Not all hard work leads to learning. *Am J Pharm Educ.* 2013;77(5): Article 89.