

VIEWPOINTS

Faculty Career Transitions: Guidance for What's Next

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Live your questions now, and perhaps even without knowing it, you will live along some distant day into your answers. - Rainer Maria Rilke

One of the many roles of any college faculty member is advising students. We use our experience as former students and as current educators, researchers, and clinicians to help students make choices as they navigate through their education and training. Advising sessions take on added urgency for many students as they approach the end of their programs and begin to think about their careers. As advisors, we make efforts to get to know our students, learning their strengths, interests, and values. We offer students our knowledge and personal experiences to help them come to decisions that will get their careers off to a good start. In addition to having access to advising, students in pharmacy programs have a variety of career development resources, including student service and career counselors, job placement services, the American Pharmacists Association Pathway Evaluation Program for Pharmacy Professionals,¹ and a variety of postgraduate and postdoctoral training programs (ie, residencies, fellowships, graduate programs, postdoctoral traineeships).

As educators, we commonly put ourselves in the shoes of our students and advisees to develop ways of better connecting with them. Understanding their needs helps us develop resources to help them learn, grow, and make good decisions. But as educators, we are often faced with the same decisions that our advisees must make, particularly when it comes to our own professional and career development. While we are familiar with the steps needed to develop as educators and researchers, particularly those involving our professional development in academia (promotion, tenure), we also know that there is much more to be navigated than merely progressing up

the academic ranks. As faculty members, we have a variety of choices to make regarding the direction we want our career to take, such as taking an administrative position; developing a new research program or clinical site; moving to another department, school, or university; or even leaving academia entirely. But unlike students who have a variety of resources to help them develop their careers, we often find ourselves with limited options when gathering information needed to make important decisions regarding our academic careers.

At the American Association of Colleges of Pharmacy Council of Faculties (COF) Business Meeting held during the 2012 Interim Meeting, a lively discussion was held regarding transitions made by faculty members over the course of their careers.² These discussions led to the 2012-2013 COF Faculty Affairs Committee being charged to identify the types of transitions that faculty members make over the course of their careers and the resources available to help them make informed decisions at career transition points, and to recommend steps that could be taken to help faculty members manage career transition points. The committee consists of 15 pharmacy faculty members from a variety of backgrounds and professional experiences who are at different stages of their careers. From the committee's preliminary discussions, we realized that most academic careers take a circuitous route with many transitions—some expected and some unexpected.

Guidance and coaching from mentors is often the first place where faculty members turn for advice when faced with career transition points. However, members of the committee quickly recognized the need for additional resources when making these types of decisions. Faculty development programs at colleges and schools of pharmacy tend to focus on specific skill development, and on more junior faculty members.³ The committee has identified a need for something more meaningful and individualized – guidance at key career transition points. The committee is gathering information on existing resources from professional and research organizations, with a goal of compiling a career transitions tool kit for

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pharmacy faculty members. The tool kit will help faculty members do for ourselves what most of us strive to do for our students and advisees; to learn more about ourselves and our options, enabling us to make choices that lead to professional success and personal fulfillment.

All pharmacy faculty members make a number of transitions throughout their careers. The committee would like to learn more about you and the resources you have turned to when creating your career pathway. Please contact either of the authors to share your stories.

REFERENCES

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