

## LETTER

### Further Research Needed for Virtual Quality Assurance Experiential Site Visits

*To the Editor:* In Volume 82, Issue 4 of the *Journal*, authors Clarke, Schott and Arnold published a study of preceptor perceptions of an innovative way of performing site visits through virtual meetings.<sup>1</sup> The authors surveyed preceptors who received either a virtual or onsite visit on the “perceptions of the value of experiential quality assurance site visits” and “preference for the type of site visit they received” and compared survey responses (N=27, Response rate= 61.4%).<sup>1</sup> The authors’ findings indicate that preceptors perceived virtual visits to be valuable and that preceptors receiving a virtual visit were more likely to prefer that method in the future.<sup>1</sup>

Per the Accreditation Council for Pharmacy Education (ACPE) standard 22.3, schools must regularly evaluate practice sites.<sup>2</sup> Site visits are a common tool utilized as part of the quality assurance process. While the authors point out the goal of the quality assurance visits include “facilitate achievement of stated course expectations, standardize key components of experiences across all sites offering the same experiential course, and promote consistent assessment of student performance,” site visits can also be used as a tool to ensure sites and preceptors continue to meet the attributes or required criteria for that educational experience.<sup>1,2</sup> ACPE standard guidance sections 20d and 22a outline attributes of preceptors and additional site criteria that could be assessed during the onsite visit but may be difficult to complete during a virtual visit (eg, “collaborating with other health care professionals”; “practicing ethically and with compassion for patients”; “a practice environment that nurtures and supports professional interactions between students, pharmacists, and patients and their caregivers”; and “equipment and technology that reflects contemporary practice and support student education for that practice”).<sup>3</sup> While it is always a concern that preceptors may say what they think schools want to hear, an onsite visit has an advantage that the site visitor can directly view the pharmacy surroundings, workflow, and items beyond the view of the camera lens. This is important as preceptor development and attitudes and site resources and culture may change over time.

Additionally, while the authors mentioned that the sites were all established experiential education sites,

most of the preceptors that participated had been precepting Drake Students for only 0-5 years (44.4% total, 45.5% virtual, 43.8% onsite).<sup>1</sup> If newer preceptors translate into newer practicing pharmacists, it may influence the preceptors’ perceptions. According to Pew Research, millennials are more likely to engage in instant messaging and social media.<sup>4</sup> While this data does not directly relate to virtual meetings, it does raise the question if younger individuals would be more receptive to virtual meetings compared to older individuals.

One of the benefits the authors mentioned was regarding time and money.<sup>1</sup> If virtual visits help facilitate regular communication with the school/college, virtual site visits may be useful for sites closer to the school to allow preceptors to communicate to the school face-to-face without having to be on campus (eg, involvement in committees). Additionally, virtual site visits may have a role in sites that are closer to the school in miles, but due to local traffic issues (eg, construction, major metropolitan area) may be time consuming to reach physically.

The study suggests an innovative approach to site visits. Further study is needed to clarify the role of virtual visits including the role of site visits augmented by virtual visits, role of virtual visits for sites undergoing quality improvement plans, the age of the preceptor on virtual site visit acceptability, and the role of virtual visits to increase distance preceptor engagement with the school/college.

Vicki Howe, PharmD

University of Texas at El Paso School of Pharmacy, El Paso, Texas

## REFERENCES

1. Clarke CL, Schott AK, Arnold AD. Preceptor perceptions of virtual quality assurance experiential site visits. *Am J Pharm Educ.* 2018;82(4):Article 6438.
2. Accreditation Council for Pharmacy Education. Accreditation standards and key elements for the professional program in pharmacy leading to the doctor of pharmacy degree. Standards 2016. <https://www.acpe-accredit.org/pdf/Standards2016FINAL.pdf>. Accessed June 5, 2018.
3. Accreditation Council for Pharmacy Education. Guidance for the accreditation standards and key elements for the professional program in pharmacy leading to the doctor of pharmacy degree. <https://www.acpe-accredit.org/pdf/GuidanceforStandards2016FINAL.pdf>. Accessed June 5, 2018.
4. Zickuhr K. Generations 2010: online activities. <http://www.pewinternet.org/2010/12/16/generations-2010/>. Accessed June 5, 2018.