

## Making the transition from pharmacy student to resident

It is common knowledge that there are not enough pharmacy residency positions across the United States for all of the very interested and qualified applicants.<sup>1,2</sup> With so much focus on the application process and setting yourself apart as a candidate, at times it feels as if you have either succeeded or failed based on your “Match Day” results. However, most of the work has only just begun on Match Day. You are sure to have the “Oh, no!” moment soon. This is when you realize that you have been so preoccupied with securing a residency position that you have not yet learned what to do next.

Most schools of pharmacy focus on the preparation, interview, and matching processes rather than on the transition from pharmacy student to resident pharmacist. This transition can be difficult, as some students feel lost during this time.<sup>3</sup> Mental and physical preparation for the actual residency is also critical to ensure that you get the most out of your residency experience. While this article does not offer one-size-fits-all guidance for every program and every individual, its purpose is to help you transition from student pharmacist to competent residency practitioner.

**Enjoy the moment.** Congratulate yourself, because you are now among an elite group. Do not take for granted that you were able to receive a highly sought after residency position. More and more students do not match every year, so consider yourself fortunate. You have worked hard to get to this point; don't breeze through this moment, only wanting to get to the next step or challenge. There is plenty of that to come.

**Meaningful study.** Very few people enjoy paperwork; however, in this circumstance it can be very beneficial. Without your diploma and your pharmacy license, you would find it very difficult to finish or even start your residency program. Finish your pharmacy curriculum

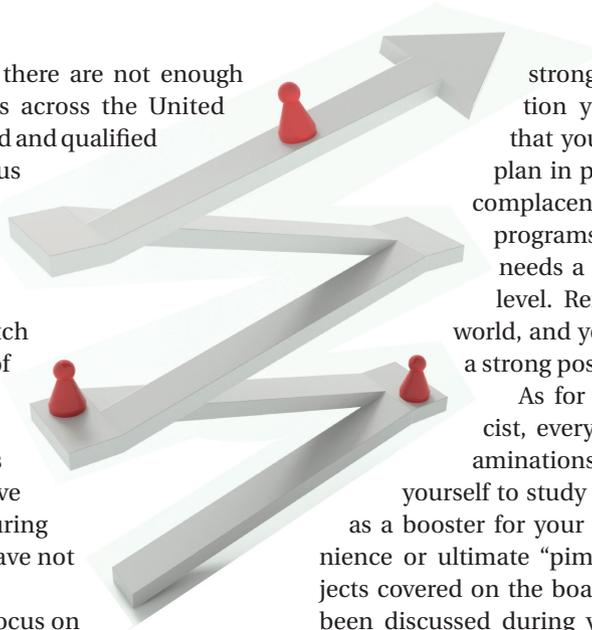
strongly, despite the lack of motivation you may be experiencing now that you finally have a postgraduation plan in place. Fight the urge to become complacent, because very few residency programs will want a new resident who needs a kick-start to perform at a high level. Remember, pharmacy is a small world, and you want to leave everyone with a strong positive opinion of who you are.

As for becoming a licensed pharmacist, every student dreads the board examinations. One way to help motivate yourself to study is to think of the examinations as a booster for your residency—not some inconvenience or ultimate “pimp” session.<sup>4</sup> Many of the subjects covered on the board examinations may not have been discussed during your rotations, yet most acute care residencies still require their residents to have a broad knowledge base. Having a good refresher before the start of your residency is very beneficial. Now this does not mean that the residency program will expect you to know everything when you arrive. If on day 1 you could do everything your preceptors could do, then why would you be doing a residency? Being familiar with most clinical topics and regulatory issues will only help you to succeed by giving you a stronger base on which to build.

This “refresher” principle also applies to postgraduate year 2 residents who are applying for specialty board certifications. While few, if any, specialty residencies require certifications, such as those offered by the Board of Pharmaceutical Specialties, before the start of the residency, most clinical practitioners would recommend taking board certification examinations as soon after your first-year residency as possible. It is likely that you will never have a broader knowledge base than after your residency.

Instead of thinking of passing the board examinations and earning your diploma as merely steps to getting into your residency program, think of them as opportunities to jump-start your residency.

**Get your mind right.** One of the biggest differences between being a student pharmacist and a pharmacist is increased independence. As a student, you grow accustomed to making recommendations during rotations while a preceptor is present in the event that you make a poor decision. As a resident, you do not always have that



*The Pharmacy Student Forum column features articles that address the unique needs of students throughout school as they transition into new practitioners. Authors include students and others with expertise in a topic of interest to students. AJHP readers are invited to submit topics or articles for this column to the Pharmacy Student Forum, c/o Diana Dabdub, 7272 Wisconsin Avenue, Bethesda, MD 20814 (301-664-8854 or students@ashp.org).*

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safety net, as most preceptors will allow you to take more control as a resident and to practice more independently. To take this principle even further, depending on the residency, you may even be asked as a resident to be the safety net for a student (which you were just a few months earlier). Clearing this hurdle can be accomplished more easily with the proper mindset. It is helpful to establish checks and balances for yourself, to know what you know and what you do not know (and be internally comfortable with this), and to have enough confidence to say “I need to look this up.” As you become more confident in yourself as a practitioner, you may not need to double-check the dose of common agents such as metoprolol, but when you first begin you may find that you want to double-check whether the dose is best for your particular patient.

These growing pains are an essential part of the residency experience. When it comes to the more-complex issues that occur with sick patients, you may not be able to pull out your smartphone and research the answer. So many things in clinical practice are not black and white, and there may be limited literature to support the treatment plan for complicated patient scenarios. In these circumstances, having the support of an experienced pharmacist will be helpful in providing a more clinical perspective and context. The combination of having a preceptor present when you need support and the exposure to these difficult situations is one of the main factors explaining why residency training advances an individual’s practice much more quickly than a position that lacks the intense educational experience.

When it comes to the new safety net provided by your preceptor, most new residents are either somewhat overconfident in their skills or afraid to ask for help or they ask about everything, afraid to make any therapeutic plans or recommendations on their own. One way to get around the latter is to always have a plan of what you would like to do before you ask the opinion of your preceptor. If there were other potential plans that you thought about before making your final decision, be prepared to discuss them. It is always better to critically evaluate a situation than to just get the answer from someone, as it better prepares you for the next time a similar issue arises. For those of you who may be afraid to ask for help or are overly confident in your skills, remember that it is always helpful to seek others’ opinions. Perhaps your conclusion will match that of someone else, but you arrived at the conclusion using differing thought processes. Allowing yourself to be open to this type of learning will significantly help you get the most out of your residency program. As you become more comfortable, you will eventually find some happy balance in knowing what you know and what you don’t know. Realize that some preceptors

may want you to discuss everything with them, especially in the beginning, while other preceptors may want you to do everything on your own. Be flexible.

**Think about the future.** Why do you want to complete a residency? Do you have specific interests, such as academia, a particular clinical area, or management? If so, ask to pursue that area during your residency. For example, if you are interested in academia, offer to give extra presentations as needs arise during the year. Helping with student rotations would also be very beneficial for you. If your interest lies in an area such as management, you may be able to take on additional projects or committee appointments throughout the year. Remember, however, that part of the goal for a first-year residency is to develop a broad knowledge base. So even if you know you want to do a postgraduate year 2 residency in infectious diseases, you cannot do a complete year of only infectious diseases rotations. Without completely tailoring all rotations to your interests, you may be able to gain extra experience by offering presentations in your interest area or by taking on an extra month of residency work in your interest area.

Let your residency directors know your interests and future plans early on as they try to help you reach your goals. This allows them more time to arrange opportunities for you to gain the experience you are seeking. Your interests may change during the year, which is natural. Again, communicating these changes to your program director will give you the best chance to get what you want out of your residency.

**Making and breaking habits.** Humans are creatures of habit, so establishing good habits early is important. Whether those habits include devoting time to projects at work or taking them home, coming in early, or leaving late, deciding what type of resident you want to be starts on day 1. Some people feel distracted when they go home and will stay at work to complete all of their projects. Others can easily get their work done at home and would rather go home to be with family, as they will be away from them enough with the long hours that the residency requires.

One other difference between being a student and a resident is all of the additional responsibilities that come with being a resident. When you were a student, you could focus on the rotation and what reading you had for the next few days. As a resident, you may be expected to run a clinical rotation, start and finish a yearlong research project, organize lectures for upcoming presentations, apply for jobs and further training, and complete any other assorted projects that may find their way to your desk. Keeping a calendar of when things are due and when you want to have them done is very helpful.

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If you were a procrastinator in school, it would behoove you to break that habit and work hard to get things finished early. The more quickly you can finish projects, the better and less stressful your year will be. In addition, being prompt frees up more time for extra experiences that may not have been available to you if you were struggling with the minimum requirements in your program. The end of the year is generally busier, so it is extremely helpful to get as much finished in the first part of the residency as possible.

**Manage your expectations.** As mentioned above, no one expects a new resident to know everything, nor should they! However, having a good attitude with a willingness to work hard and put in the time required to produce excellent results is expected. If you can do this, you will have great success in your program and will be able to make it a “five-star” experience. What you get out of your residency year is almost completely determined by you, the resident. If you do not feel that you are getting enough to read concerning a particular topic, then research it yourself or ask for more of that type of experience on your rotations. It is your residency year; take initiative, and make it your own.

The residents who have the most success during their residency year are those who develop a passion for learning and desire to do whatever it takes to excel. This type of passion is contagious and makes it so much more enjoyable for all those involved in making your residency the best it can be.

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