

ERNEST MARIO SCHOOL OF PHARMACY PRECEPTOR NEWSLETTER

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Cultivating Clinical Confidence

Prepared by Kosha Ravani and Nidhi Patel



Our time as Knight Scholars at Penn Medicine Princeton Medical Center was an incredible learning experience, thanks to preceptors who challenged us to think like clinical pharmacists and step outside of our comfort zones. While we both shared experiences during our emergency medicine and internal medicine rotations, we were able to explore our individual interests on our elective rotations in behavioral health and infectious diseases. While activities like medication reconciliations and patient counseling initially seemed intimidating, they allowed us to collaborate with the healthcare team and make impactful interventions. Through our hard work and careful guidance of our preceptors, we identified two experiences that show us how our interventions could meaningfully influence patient care.

One of the most memorable learning experiences on the infectious diseases rotation involved a complex case of a *Nocardia farcinica* pulmonary infection. After performing a deep dive into the patient's clinical picture, we developed a plan for dosing amikacin using the Hartford nomogram. Later in the course of their care we helped develop a recommendation to transition therapy to an alternative regimen that minimized toxicity while maintaining efficacy. Working through the layers of this case demonstrated how evidence is translated into clinical practice through developing patient-centered decisions. This experience shaped how both of us evaluated every subsequent patient encounter.

During the behavioral health rotation, we performed an in-depth review of a patient that involved collecting information regarding their past medication history, specific comorbidities, and treatment goals. Using that information, we were able to synthesize a patient-specific recommendation that was accepted by the psychiatrist. This experience challenged us to practice developing recommendations in the gray area of clinical practice where clinical evidence is sparse. Furthermore, learning what to do when we've exhausted all our treatment options taught us the importance of carving out an alternate plan to meet the patient's needs, especially when managing complex patients with multiple comorbidities.

These ambiguous clinical cases led us to enter the Rutgers New Jersey Society of Health-System Pharmacists (NJSHP) Clinical Skills Competition. Walking in, we weren't too confident if we could complete a thorough workup in two hours. We quickly realized that we had the skills to identify labs, monitoring parameters, and patient-specific factors to guide therapy. Working together felt seamless, and we often laughed asking each other, "remember when we had a patient just like this?". While we were not the winning team, we came in the top three finalists! It was a valuable experience that reminded us how much we had learned over the past few months and helped us trust our judgement just as our preceptors had.

We are immensely grateful to our preceptors at Penn Medical Princeton Medical Center for this experience. We will carry our skills and knowledge with us, wherever our paths take us. We would like to especially thank our preceptors - Dr. Kristin Reinaker (emergency medicine), Dr. Hinal Patel (infectious diseases), Dr. Mei T. Liu (behavioral health), Dr. Cavan O'Kane (internal medicine), and Dr. Sindhu Abraham (hospital administration) for their guidance, mentorship, and support throughout our rotations. Their dedication pushed us to think critically, collaborate effectively and apply our knowledge to improve patient care every day. Thank you for helping us grow as clinicians and inspiring us to approach every patient encounter thoughtfully and confidently.



Bridging Patient Care and Research: A Hands-On Rotation in Clinical Research Coordination

Prepared by Rachel Sun, PharmD Candidate 2026

My rotation with the Environmental and Occupational Health Sciences Institute's Clinical Research Unit offered an engaging experience in clinical research and the role pharmacists can play in this field. Over the course of five weeks as a PharmD/PhD student, I gained an extensive understanding of the operations required to successfully manage and support an ongoing clinical study.

A significant portion of my experience centered on reviewing the electronic health record (EHR) to identify patients who met the inclusion and exclusion criteria for the study. After identifying potential candidates, I participated in the informed consent process. Shadowing and later assisting with patient discussions at the Jack and Sheryl Morris Cancer Center, I learned how to clearly explain the study objectives, expectations, and risks of a clinical study. It is important to make sure that the patient has a clear understanding before enrollment. It is also helpful to answer any questions related to immunotherapy and its potential side effects in an empathetic manner.

In addition, I gained practical laboratory experience through coordinating sample collection and processing alongside the nursing staff and laboratory personnel. This involved learning proper handling procedures and biospecimen labeling requirements. I was also responsible for completing study-related documentation in RedCap, which reinforced the importance of accurate, timely, and compliant record-keeping in clinical research. Completing the Clinical Research Coordination Badge further strengthened my foundational knowledge of study ethics and data management. The opportunity to also attend seminars and research meetings reinforced my understanding of oncology, immune checkpoint inhibitors, and emerging biomarkers. These enlightening discussions boosted the translational nature of clinical research—connecting laboratory discoveries to patient care.

Overall, this rotation provided an insightful exposure to clinical research coordination. It strengthened my technical skills, enhanced my communication abilities, and deepened my appreciation for the teamwork and precision required to execute a clinical study. This experience not only broadened my understanding of clinical research but also reinforced my interest in contributing to evidence-based science that advances patient care. I am looking forward to more rotations, like this, that provide such new and innovative experiences.



From left to right: Jack & Sheryl Morris Cancer Center (left); Sonia Song (PharmD/PhD student, left), Shams Shams (Postdoctoral Associate, BPharm, Ms, PhD, middle), and Rachel Sun (PharmD/PhD student, right), at Jack & Sheryl Morris Cancer Center, recruiting patients to a clinical study.



Beyond the Script

A Conversation that Changed How I Counsel



Prepared by Sameera Mirza, PharmD Candidate 2026

One afternoon during rotations, I followed my preceptor into a session expecting a quick, straightforward conversation about psychiatry medications. Instead, I walked into a moment that completely shifted the way I approach patient counseling.

As I walked into the appointment, I noticed the patient looked like a “rockstar”, as he had multiple ear piercings, a nose ring, a lip ring, and displayed a fearless attitude with confident energy. He wore bold clothes and a strong presence that filled the room. Before he said anything, I had assumed he would be relaxed and maybe a little detached, and that the counseling session would be easy.

That assumption disappeared within minutes.

As soon as he started speaking with my preceptor and I, he expressed things I would have never expected. Among several other issues, he talked about stressors in his life that contributed negatively to his mental health. He described constantly fighting with his wife. He also expressed that he was unwilling to get out of bed in the morning because of seasonal depression, especially during the holiday season. He expressed that being anxious causes him to become overwhelmed about even the simplest of things. However, throughout the session, he was hesitant to talk about his struggles and he looked downwards in an effort to avoid eye contact. Because I assumed he would be bold and confident, I was shocked to see him act oppositely. I realized he was not just asking about medication instructions. He was trying to understand how to feel stable again.

While we went through his psychiatry meds, he listened to my counseling points carefully and asked few to no questions. Upon completion of the counseling session, I realized that if I had let my initial impression guide the way I counseled him, I would have missed the depth of what he was actually experiencing.

That conversation taught me that a patient’s appearance tells you nothing about their internal state of mind or the everyday struggles they battle. It really hit me how little we truly know about someone until we sit down and listen. The ability to help patients as a healthcare professional occurs when you slow down to drop your assumptions and meet patients exactly where they are.

I changed the way I walk into counseling sessions and now reset my mind before them. I remind myself that anyone could be dealing with issues. They could be dealing with a lot, such as depression or anxiety. I also ask more open-ended questions, so patients truly feel a sense of belonging. I take my time in explaining things more clearly, so patients develop a sense of understanding. Instead of following preconceived assumptions, I create an environment for patients to tell their story.

I have learned that judgment and healthcare can never go hand in hand, especially in psychiatry. If I let my assumptions dominate conversation with patients, I could miss the information that makes treatment work for them. Essentially, I would be unable to craft an individualized-patient centered plan that takes into account all different aspects of the patient’s life.

This counseling session and conversation allowed me to change my approach when talking to patients. I realized I want to help my patients by using my knowledge and empathy. I further realized that I can do this by engaging in simple, genuine conversation. I look forward to growing through experiences like this one and hope for this to be an attitude I carry with me and expand on throughout my pharmacy career.



Defining Moments in the APPE Year: Fellowship Recruitment and the Power of Preceptor Support

Prepared by Yasmine Beche and Stacey Zhang, PharmD Candidates 2026

The APPE year is widely recognized as the most formative phase of pharmacy training. It is a time when students are expected to function with increasing independence, professionalism, and accountability as they transition from learners to emerging pharmacists. For students pursuing postdoctoral industry fellowships, Cycles 4 through 6 coincide with one of the most rigorous and competitive recruitment processes in the profession. As two APPE students who successfully navigated fellowship recruitment while completing full-time rotations, we offer this perspective to highlight the challenges students face and, importantly, the influential role preceptors play during this defining period.

Fellowship recruitment unfolds during an already demanding year. Interviews are often concentrated into short timeframes and may involve multiple rounds, full-day commitments, and high-level presentations developed under tight timelines. For many students, these interviews represent years of preparation and a narrow window to pursue a highly specific career path. Balancing this process alongside APPE responsibilities requires thoughtful planning, adaptability, and sustained professionalism.

Throughout this process, students should remain deeply committed to their rotations. Most view APPEs not as obligations to work around, but as essential components of their professional development. Challenges may arise, however, when the intensity and scope of fellowship recruitment are not immediately visible. For example, we participated in approximately 20 interviews over a two-and-a-half-week period, followed by a full week of virtual evening receptions lasting two to three hours each, and subsequently multiple final-round interviews consisting of full-day virtual and in-person sessions. In recent years, the competitive nature of industry fellowships has also led many students to apply to multiple academic-affiliated or standalone programs simultaneously, further intensifying this period.

In this context, preceptor guidance and support play a critical role. Clear expectations, flexibility when feasible, and open communication allowed us to remain accountable to rotation responsibilities while navigating competing demands. Opportunities such as completing projects virtually on interview-heavy days, taking on additional responsibilities to offset time away, working to make up time in the evenings and/or weekends, or aligning projects and topic discussions with long-term career interests helped reduce stress while maintaining educational experiences. These approaches reinforced that accommodation, and high standards are not mutually exclusive.

Through conversations with peers, we also came to appreciate that student experiences during this period can vary widely. While some rotations naturally allow for greater scheduling flexibility, other students have encountered environments where fellowship pursuits are less understood or not overtly supported, which can unintentionally add pressure during an already high-stakes time. In these situations, students may experience guilt when requesting interview accommodations or feel compelled to overextend themselves to reaffirm their commitment to the rotation. Even when unintentional, a lack of visible support can heighten stress and uncertainty, making it more difficult for students to fully engage in both learning and recruitment.

❄️ ❄️ Defining Moments in the APPE Year: Fellowship ❄️ ❄️

Recruitment and the Power of Preceptor Support (continued)

This contrast reinforced for us how impactful preceptor attitudes and approaches can be. Some of the most impactful moments of our APPE year occurred when preceptors took genuine interest in our professional goals. Even brief conversations acknowledging fellowship paths or discussing how rotation experiences translate beyond traditional roles reinforced that pharmacy offers many avenues for meaningful contribution. These moments transformed an intense period into one marked by growth, confidence, and professional clarity. Preceptors who trusted us to manage our time responsibly and encouraged our long-term goals enabled us to approach both rotations and interviews with greater focus and confidence.

Ultimately, this experience underscored the importance of communication and mutual understanding. Preceptors are responsible for delivering high-quality rotations and meaningful educational experiences, while students likewise have a responsibility to communicate their needs proactively, uphold rotation expectations, and respect the time, effort, and mentorship their preceptors provide. When both parties approach this period with transparency, professionalism, and shared accountability, fellowship recruitment and APPE training can coexist in a way that supports student development without compromising the integrity of the APPE experience.

