

Advanced experiential placements: Challenges and opportunities for preceptors

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Introduction: The Doctorate in Pharmacy course offered by the University of Malta, Malta, in collaboration with the University of Illinois, Chicago, United States of America, offers six-week advanced experiential placements. Preceptors for the placement at Medicines Information guide international post-graduate doctorate students through an advanced clinical experiential education.

Method: In 2016, before the first cohort of doctorate students were admitted to the programme, the Pharmacy Department at the University of Malta offered a preceptor development programme for hospital clinical pharmacists. This short, intensive, training programme included sessions by speakers from University of Illinois, Chicago and the American College of Clinical Pharmacy in relation to clinical pharmacist activities and roles as preceptor. This programme focused on how students rely on experiential rotations to explore the application of clinical pharmacy theory in practice and to prepare them for role modelling and student mentorship as preceptors themselves. Preceptors need to be able to prioritise areas during the post-graduate rotation to guide students to reflect on real-life, dynamic patient care situations.

Results: The preceptor development programme served to highlight effective preceptorship skills for postgraduate international clinical pharmacy rotations. The requirement to balance strong communication skills, assessment skills, teaching and leadership skills with technical skills is key to successful role modelling. Applying this educational preceptorship amidst a variety of cultural and pharmaceutical differences, and integrating students within local practice is essential for enhancing the educational experience. Moreover, presenting diverse learning scenarios and maximising clinical exposure during the experiential placement are fundamental for the students' successful learning experience.

Conclusions: Preceptors can benefit from a rewarding professional experience in addition to a satisfying preceptor-student relationship, when integrating students into their daily activities by bringing out their best potential. It is important for preceptors to periodically perform self-assessment and identify areas that require further improvement.

Initial sessions of degree in pharmacy internships: Face-to-face versus virtualisation

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Introduction: Curricular external internships are a compulsory element of Pharmacy degrees, by the European directive, of 30 ECTS. In the 2019/20 academic year, Specific Training Sessions were organised for the first time for fifth year students prior to their internships. A programme divided into five practical/theoretical workshop-presential modules was proposed (electronic prescription, pharmaceutical care, magistral formulation, pharmacovigilance and research in pharmacy). During the 2020/21 academic year, due to the health emergency caused by SARS-Cov-2, it was necessary to hold it in a hybrid mode (face-to-face and online, 20/80%). The third edition (conducted in the 2021/22 academic year) has returned to face-to-face attendance but kept some virtual sessions. The objective of this study is to evaluate the experience of the implementation and subsequent virtualisation of the Pharmacy Degree Internship Initial Sessions and assess the satisfaction of the participants after three years of experience.

Methods: Evidence has been collected through a satisfaction questionnaire completed both by students and speakers. The questionnaire was carried out using Google Forms tool with 26 questions in the first edition, 20 in the second and third, on a Likert-type scale. In addition, open questions were included to allow participants to express suggestions.

Results: During the first initial sessions, retransmission of virtual sessions at specific times was adopted to refresh access to electronic prescriptions and actions of pharmaceutical technicians. The use of this technology received a positive evaluation from 70% of the students. The good acceptance of this methodology, as well as the pandemic situation in the second year, made this tool essential for more virtualisation.

Conclusions: The answers received after the first and second edition of the programme made it possible to introduce improvements that contributed to improved overall evaluation from students. The Initial Sessions have been, both in the face-to-face and virtual modalities, a very satisfactory experience for students, teachers and organisers. This initiative has made it possible to integrate knowledge, acquire skills and develop abilities, helping to establish a frame of reference and increase the interest of students in collaborating with pharmaceutical professionals before their internships and their insertion into the world of work.