

## Success in academia: Tips for balancing clinical and faculty roles

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Despite the recent transition from a candidate-driven market to an employer-driven market in light of the economy and increasing numbers of graduating pharmacists, significant growth is expected in pharmacy education.<sup>1,2</sup> Data obtained from an American Association of Colleges of Pharmacy (AACCP) survey conservatively estimate the number of FTE faculty members to increase by 13% between 2010 and 2015, which indicates that there may be additional opportunities for pharmacy clinicians with academic appointments.<sup>2</sup> While positions such as these offer many advantages and opportunities, they can also be associated with significant workload and high turnover rates.<sup>3</sup>

For new and experienced academicians alike, the world of academia can feel as if one is being pulled in a variety of directions. Clinical faculty members find themselves juggling clinical practice and patient care, research, didactic and clinical site teaching, service obligations, and much more, simultaneously. If clinical faculty members are not cautious, burnout can quickly set in, casting an ominous shadow over the benefits such positions offer. Finding the right balance between clinical practice and academic responsibilities takes time, patience, commitment, and good mentorship. For those who relish variety, academia offers a unique position to enjoy diverse roles that are both challenging and rewarding. Practitioners must carefully balance competing obligations in order to be successful professionally and personally. The objective of this article is to offer helpful tips (summarized in Table 1) for how to juggle these responsibilities and strive for improved balance.

**Table 1. Tips for Success**

- Be flexible
- Collaborate
- Continually strive for good work-life balance
- Find a strong mentor and be a good mentee
- Get feedback from patients, colleagues, and students
- Multiply efforts
- Remember that perfectionism is unattainable
- Set clear expectations and be realistic
- Speak up and say no when needed

### SAYING NO

The first “rule” in avoiding burnout in academia is “learn how to say no.” This can be easier said than done for new practitioners who may not want to pass on opportunities for professional development and who desire to build their curriculum vitae. For example, it can be very difficult to turn down an invitation to co-author a book chapter, spearhead a research project, or prepare a presentation for a statewide, regional, or national audience. These are all highly regarded activities, particularly for promotion at most institutions. However, tackling each of these activities in a given year may be more than enough for a single person to handle. Before new practitioners overcommit themselves in the race for promotion or professional development, they must carefully consider competing deadlines for these various activities as well as the impact on workload and stress. Additionally, clinical faculty must be careful to avoid committing to opportunities which do not match their professional goals. An example of this may be a tempting collaboration with a more experienced colleague on a project related more to their area of interest or expertise. On the other hand, being flexible and seizing opportunities as they become available is also important. Prioritizing and having clear, yet adaptable, professional and personal goals can assist in decision-making and setting of a realistic and manageable timeline if promotion is the goal. Open communication and discussion with department administration can help faculty members ensure they are on the right track. Creation and review of a faculty development plan with supervisors can help set goals and prioritize opposing charges. This plan can account for both short and long-term goals and should be revisited regularly, perhaps as part of an annual review process. Discussing opportunities with mentors can also provide valuable insight as to the significance of competing responsibilities’ value for professional growth.

### MENTORSHIP

Mentors come in all shapes and sizes, from peers and senior faculty to colleagues outside of the field of pharmacy. New faculty should seek mentors whom they admire personally, who demonstrate compassion, are supportive and committed to their success, and who

encourage personal and professional life balance.<sup>4</sup> Mentor-mentee relationships can vary widely, and are individualized based on the needs of those involved. Topics to explore early in the relationship include a frank discussion of expectations and determining an appropriate frequency of meetings.<sup>5</sup> Goals of these relationships may include support, guidance in creation of career goals, assistance with problem-solving, orientation to a new institution, and collegiality, among many other possibilities.<sup>6</sup> In order to meet their needs, a mentee may have various mentors to help them reach their individualized goals. In the relationship, mentees must also be aware of their expectations, which include respecting the mentor's time, being flexible with scheduling, remaining open to constructive criticism, maintaining contact, and taking ownership of their own development.<sup>5</sup> In addition to the practical advice and empathy these mentors can offer, mentors have been shown to improve retention among junior faculty members, promote collegiality, and positively impact work-life balance.<sup>6</sup> Not surprisingly, mentorship also enables success with regard to scholarly activity.<sup>7</sup> In academia, scholarly activity is considered a requirement of clinical faculty. A 2009 survey revealed that 60% of pharmacy practice faculty report scholarship as a critical component for advancement, with one peer-reviewed publication a year a common expectation.<sup>8</sup> The importance of scholarly activity for faculty members is further emphasized in the Accreditation Council for Pharmacy Education (ACPE) standards and guidelines, which state "Faculty should generate and disseminate knowledge through scholarship. Scholarship by faculty members, including the scholarship of teaching, must be evident and demonstrated by productive research and other scholarly activities, such as contributions to the scientific, professional, and educational literature; publication of books and review articles; and successes in securing extramural funding to support research and other scholarly activities" (Guideline 25.8).<sup>9</sup> As previously mentioned, mentorship can help new faculty with scholarly pursuits, an expectation often challenged by a lack of time available to pursue these endeavors.<sup>7,8</sup> Collaboration may also aid with this challenge.

## **COLLABORATION**

Collaboration with colleagues is also an ingredient for success when it comes to scholarship, among other pursuits.<sup>7</sup> Faculty should consider collaborating with colleagues in every venue. For example, clinical faculty may entice medicine or nurse colleagues to assist in typing up an interesting patient case. Additionally, faculty

may have opportunities to work with students or residents to draft a review article from the literature that has already been pulled and summarized. Opportunities for scholarship seem to be endless due to the various roles of the clinical faculty member. With that in mind, faculty should not be afraid to remember rule #1 and say no when the activity fails to be a good fit with their professional goals. The topics of collaboration and scholarship lead well into the next tip for success, getting the most bang for your buck.

## **BIG BANG**

In addition to considering professional goals, when determining the value of a particular project, clinical faculty should be proactive and consider other possibilities to multiply the efforts. Clinical faculty members must make the most out of the limited time available for competing tasks. For example, busy clinicians can get the most out of their efforts by disseminating information regarding innovative courses or clinical services, or turning a frequent drug information question that lacks supporting evidence into a study. Clinical faculty can strive to pair projects with publications – and in these instances, persistence pays off! Engaging the assistance of others to help with hurdles can offer great benefits as well. Colleagues, students, and residents can make for great collaborators in these instances. With teaching as an expectation for pharmacists in these roles, they may consider turning a lecture into a publication, particularly if it's a topic that will add to the existing literature. Publication can be done quite smoothly, since most of the work and research for preparing the lecture has already been done. In addition, presenting posters to share work at various stages can also add to a growing list of scholarly work moving clinical faculty members closer to their career goals.

## **SETTING CLEAR EXPECTATIONS**

To achieve professional goals, clear communication about expectations and responsibilities is necessary to garner adequate support from supervisors and colleagues in different settings. This includes communicating competing commitments with colleagues as well as students in the classroom or on experiential rotations. When it comes to patient care, colleagues must have a strong understanding of the responsibilities of a clinical faculty member and how this may impact the provision of clinical services. Discussing actions colleagues should take if a patient care issue arises during an absence is important to developing relationships with the patient care team. Furthermore, collecting feedback on the services offered, including patient care and didactic and

experiential education, is critical to evaluate the effectiveness of various roles and to meet the needs and expectations of colleagues and students.

### MISSION IMPOSSIBLE: PERFECTION

Despite impressive efforts to exceed expectations of patients, colleagues, and students, the clinical faculty member is rarely given the resource of time, which is required to approach perfection. Once clinical faculty members accept this fact, finding personal and professional satisfaction is within reach. Academicians with clinical responsibilities must hold realistic expectations or otherwise are set up for failure and burnout. Focus should be spent on striving for balance.

So, how can one truly find balance? Balance means different things at different times over the course of the semester, year, and our lives. From work-life or teaching-patient care balance, the scales are constantly adjusting to meet professional and personal responsibilities. With this in mind, clinical faculty must remember that "balance," in the typical sense, is an illusion. Clinical faculty can strive to maintain balance to the best of their ability; however, they must realize this usually means sacrificing performance in certain areas to meet the most pressing needs at that time – whether it's meeting a manuscript deadline, preparing for a lecture the next day, or following up on an urgent patient care issue. Perfectionism is no longer a reality, which can be a tough pill to swallow for pharmacists. Perhaps considering "balance," as cited in the World English Dictionary, as "harmony in the parts of a whole," and striving to discover what fulfills us each individually, is a more realistic expectation.<sup>10</sup> For many individuals, the satisfaction of working in a clinical faculty position exemplifies fulfillment.

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