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Conducting Successful Residencies

Jacob shares how he has refined, along with his Residency Program Directors, the residency process for postgraduate year (PGY) 1 and several PGY2 programs for which he has responsibility. His responsibilities include the recruiting, interviewing, and selection processes. He offers advice on mentoring and coaching residents, including those areas where he derives the most satisfaction.

Jacob J. Tillmann is currently the Pharmacy Residency Program Coordinator, North Florida/South Georgia Veterans Health System. Previously he was a Clinical Pharmacy Specialist. Jacob received his PharmD from Drake University and completed a geriatric specialty residency at the Gainesville VA Medical Center.

Jacob's advice is: ***Find residents that fit your program. It will certainly help make your program and the residents who complete it more likely to be successful. Remember to take time away from your residency (or career) and do whatever recharges you. When you return the next day or next week, you are in the best possible mindset.***



Dear Young Pharmacist,

In early 2009, I was given the opportunity to take on a newly created position at the North Florida/South Georgia Veterans Health System in Gainesville, Florida. I became the pharmacy's Residency Program Coordinator, a position that developed as a result of the expansion of our residency programs—to include 18 PGY1 residents, two PGY2 residents, and a pharmacy fellow—and necessitated improved coordination for more trainees. I had worked in both acute and ambulatory care in the 6 years since completing my residency as well as completing an interdisciplinary, inter-facility leadership development program within the Department of Veterans Affairs in preparation for taking on leadership roles as my career progressed.

Being a Residency Director is something that fit in well with my personal and professional goals. It allowed me to gain exposure to a leadership role while also allowing me to expand on my love of education. Because education is an important family value, I am passionate about training the next generation of pharmacists as well as incorporating training and education into my everyday practice. I also realized that by moving into this administrative role, I was able to impact more patients than I could in my day-to-day clinical practice. I might see 10-20 patients per day in my practice; but as Residency Coordinator, I help shape the practice of more than 20 residents each year that will then use the skills they learn in their clinical practices after completion of the residency.

For me, the position of Residency Coordinator comes with tremendous gratitude from residents throughout the year and especially at the end of the year. By far, the best part of my job is having residents tell me that they got the jobs they wanted, the location they wanted, or ideally both. There are also many thankless portions of the job. When I stepped into this role, I didn't fully realize what happens behind the scenes of a residency program to make it appear to flow smoothly—reviewing applications, conducting interviews, scheduling residents in learning experiences, attending meetings, developing preceptors, and preparing accreditation surveys and responses to the quality assurance reviews of the program. The list goes on, with a never-ending to-do list to make that next improvement (which is part of the perfectionism that we as pharmacists tend to exhibit).

When I started in this position, I talked with our current Residency Directors to determine how I could best assist them with their residents and how I could help with the transition of the residency class that had already been selected for the coming year. I talked with residents about how I could best support them and questioned my colleagues from around the VA about how they managed their programs. Utilizing the wealth of knowledge and experience of others allowed me to make better decisions about altering the program in a smarter way than trial and error and also reduced time spent on developing ideas. Never stop asking questions. You need to remember that others in your network or organization have experiences worth sharing, and you can learn from them. I realized some colleagues expanded the quality of residency programs in very unique ways; the more I talked to people around me, the more I appreciated that there will always be an opportunity to share ideas and continue to enhance my program.

Because of my experiences and discussions, the residency program here has continued to evolve over the 7 years that I have been in my position. We have reduced the number of PGY1 residents but increased our number of PGY2 residents and programs, which certainly has its advantages. But it also brings new challenges. Although it was always important to have the residents who best fit the