

Margaret Chrymko

BS, PharmD, MA, RPh, FASHP



Promoting Resident Well-Being

Margaret has been active in clinical pharmacy practice and residency training for over 30 years and has a number of publications. She is currently a Clinical Pharmacy Specialist at the Erie Veterans Affairs Medical Center where she started the postgraduate year (PGY) 1 residency in 2002. She holds an appointment as an Adjunct Clinical Professor at Lake Erie College of Medicine School of Pharmacy. In 2011, she received the ASHP Research and Education Foundation Pharmacy Residency Excellence Award for Preceptors. She is a member of several professional organizations and has served as the President of the Pennsylvania Society of Health-System Pharmacists and on several ASHP committees, including the ASHP Commission on Credentialing, a guest surveyor for residency accreditation, and as faculty for the RLS/RPDC workshops.

Margaret received her BS and PharmD degrees from the State University of New York at Buffalo and completed her residency at the Erie County Medical Center in Buffalo. She also completed a MA in Pastoral Studies at Gannon University.

Margaret's precepting advice is: *Treat residents' well-being as a top priority. Teach work-life balance and coping skills. Know and encourage the use of available resources for stress management and burnout prevention.*



Note: The author has written this work in her personal capacity. The views expressed are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the position or policy of the Department of Veterans Affairs or the United States government.

The author wishes to acknowledge and thank *William N. Jones, MS, RPh, FASHP* for his review and input.

Dear Colleague,

After I completed my education, my residency, and was practicing, I thought I knew what I had signed up for. I loved teaching and coaching residents, but I didn't have a clue that I would need to address their well-being. I had no training or experience for this, but the importance of their well-being was clear. I frequently see articles on suicide or burnout, and I ask myself "Why?" The answer seems multi-faceted. Expectations are high; the world is complex and fast moving; social support systems aren't always in place; we are constantly connected to our devices; and social media influencers are prevalent. Yet, identifying all of this doesn't address a resident's well-being. *Where do we start?*

I encourage residents to reflect on who they are as well as their values, goals, and priorities. Seeing the big picture early in the program can build a good foundation. Periodic review of their insights is also important. This may help them put things in perspective and reframe situations.

Once they have defined their goals, what else should be addressed? I try to remember that I am dealing with trainees who were very successful prior to starting the residency. They are accustomed to getting positive reinforcement and being at the top of the class. Now they are at a new level where there may be less positive reinforcement. They get more criticism than they have previously received. Some handle this well, while others may be frustrated or even devastated. I need to orient residents to realistic expectations regarding performance and feedback to minimize their frustration. I also need to ensure that other preceptors do not have unrealistic expectations.

While orienting the residents, I introduce them to a self-monitoring approach for their performance. We also discuss signs of depression, anxiety, and burnout, and the resources available to help with these issues. Withdrawal, decrease in performance, lack of interest or engagement, avoidance, irritability, lack of sleep, and lack of self-care may be indicators of larger problems that may need immediate attention and referral. Residents have to recognize these signs in themselves, patients, or colleagues. They need to monitor their own mental health and stress and develop coping skills.

Numerous factors contribute to stress. Many of our pharmacy trainees are perfectionists, which can be good, but it can paralyze residents to the point that they waste time and can't complete anything. Helping them understand that I expect them to do their best but I don't expect perfection, and neither should they, may be liberating for them. It is helpful to talk about *accuracy* versus *perfection*. We need to be as accurate as possible, especially when dealing with