

Minding the (Generation) Gap: Setting Expectations Before Conversations Get Tough

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Objectives

- Describe current pharmacy student qualities
- Analyze communication gaps and learning style differences
- Model workplace expectations and values
- Implement effective precepting strategies
- Build bridges to narrow the gap

Gen Z's: Our Current Pharmacy Students

- Born: 1997–2012
- “Digital Natives” born with technology in their hands
- Value work-life balance and mental health awareness (ACPE Standard)
- Seek frequent feedback, “how” may differ
- Comfortable with technology and may prefer digital communication

Gen Z's: Our Current Pharmacy Students

Lukianoff and Haidt (2018) explored the culture of “safetyism” and the resulting characteristics of Gen Z's.

- Increased polarization in society
- Rising rates of anxiety and depression
- Intensification of protectionism from parents
- Decline in unsupervised “free play” among children since 1980's

Discussion Questions for Preceptors

- What challenges have you noticed with current students?
- What has worked well in engaging this generation?
- How can we balance their expectations with professional realities?

Common Communication Gaps

Differ in communication styles:

- text/email/Zoom
- phone/in-person

Common Communication Gaps

Expectations around response times:

- In episode 1224 of John Lienhard's, "*The Engines of Our Ingenuity*" Richard Madeaus, a computer systems manager, was quoted saying:

"...Yesterday we were content to wait two weeks for an answer to a letter. Today, someone who doesn't answer e-mail within the hour is an obstructionist."

Common Communication Gaps

- Varying degrees of comfort around direct feedback and yet there is value in providing, in-the-moment feedback
- Differences in professional boundaries, social media presence and professional identity; creating potential professionalism concerns
- This is my number one reason for IPPE/APPE failures

Learning Style Preferences

- Active learning preferences over lecture formats:
 - Academia is slow to respond/conform
- Expect on-demand information access
- Short attention spans; due to influence of social media screen time
- Comfortable with virtual or remote learning

Workplace Expectations and Values

- Flexibility and autonomy in scheduling and work arrangements
- Regular recognition and feedback (not just mid-point and final reviews)
- Emphasis on meaningful work and patient impact
- Mental health support and reasonable workload expectations

So, where do we go from here?

Precepting Strategies and Bridging the Gap

Academic and preceptor obligations:

- Preceptors and faculty should meet students where they are.
 - We still have an obligation to move students from point A (where they are) to point B (practice ready)

Precepting Strategies and Bridging the Gap

- This obligation does NOT excuse unprofessional behaviour, knowledge deficits, or unacceptable attitudes
- Establish clear expectations and learning objectives early

Precepting Strategies and Bridging the Gap

Create psychologically safe learning environments

- Use mistakes as teaching moments rather than sources of shame
 - Focus on systems
- Clear expectations
 - Students feel safer when they know exactly what's expected of them
- Consistent, two-way feedback culture
 - Supervisors invite students to share their own observations about the learning environment, not just receive feedback themselves.
 - Visible modeling of vulnerability by preceptors

Precepting Strategies and Bridging the Gap

Create psychologically safe learning environments (continued)

- Experienced pharmacists should be comfortable admitting they don't know everything
 - Let students know you still look things up
 - Share with them when you made similar mistakes early in your career
- Protected time for questions without judgment
 - Whether through a dedicated check-in, a standing "no-such-thing-as-a-dumb-question" window, or simply a preceptor who consistently responds with curiosity rather than impatience

Precepting Strategies and Bridging the Gap

- Emphasize student strengths vs. deficits
- Focus on opportunities
- Balance independence with appropriate supervision

Precepting Strategies and Bridging the Gap

- What happens if “Conversations Get Tough?”
 - This is what Grenny et al. (2022) called a “*Crucial Conversation*”
- Find common ground through a shared commitment (i.e. patient care)
 - As Grenny et al. (2022) suggested in the seventh law of *Crucial Conversations*, “make it safe by creating a mutual purpose.”
 - Here we have another example of psychological safety.

Discussion Questions for Preceptors

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Knowledge Check

Generation Z's share which of the following characteristics?

- A. Prefer in-person experiences vs. virtual
- B. Patiently await email and text responses
- C. Have differing levels of comfort receiving feedback
- D. Are technology challenged

Knowledge Check

The preferred expectation for preceptors is:

- A. Sporadic feedback, no more than midpoint and final
- B. Review expectations after a disappointment
- C. Provide in-the-moment feedback
- D. Allow discordance of shared goals

Knowledge Check

How do faculty and preceptors best meet students' needs?

- A. Set expectations early
- B. Adopt a shared vision for outstanding patient care
- C. Model appropriate attitudes and skills
- D. Focus on student strengths and opportunities
- E. All of the above

References

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