

What I look for in a resident

Pearls of wisdom from seasoned preceptors

Pharmacy Student sought out four experienced preceptors to ask them the burning question: What do you look for in a resident? Student pharmacists considering a residency after graduation should heed these words of advice, as competition for slots is fierce and all candidates are looking for an edge.



Kristin Weitzel, PharmD, University of Florida

As a residency director, I am frequently asked by students what qualities I look for when selecting a resident. The easiest part of answering that question is making a list of the attributes I seek out in residency candidates. This list includes leadership skills, motivation, dependability, clinical skills, pharmacotherapy

knowledge, communication skills, research experience, time management skills, a positive attitude, a strong work ethic, and a passion for advancing the profession of pharmacy.

The more difficult part comes when students follow up with the logical next question, asking how I differentiate which candidates possess these qualities among a large pool of residency applicants. In reality, almost all student pharmacists have demonstrated these qualities through achieving success in applying to and completing the rigorous curriculum of pharmacy school. The challenge is to effectively communicate to residency preceptors and directors that you are everything in the list above.

Many of these qualities are apparent in a candidate's transcript, letter of intent, and CV. I advise students to put a lot of effort into ensuring that their CV accurately reflects their academic, leadership, and research achievements, and that their letter of intent reflects their motivation, attitude, and passion for the area of pharmacy that they intend to pursue. Students should seek out examples of students' CVs and letters of intent from faculty and preceptors to help them in this process. Focusing on this documentation offers objective, measurable methods to communicate universally desirable core traits to residency preceptors and directors.

Many of the other traits that I look for in a potential resident are more abstract—positive attitude, strong work ethic, ability to work in a team environment, communication skills. This is where the personal interactions students have with residency directors become valuable. It is important to put thought into opportunities to communicate with a residency director outside of the actual application process. Students have an opportunity to demonstrate many of these traits by presenting themselves as professional, enthusiastic candidates at residency recruitment events, or even prior to these events—sending an e-mail to introduce yourself and to let the director know that you are interested in his or her program is a great way to start off communication. Likewise, a well-

conceived and articulate thank you letter after a meeting or interview conveys that you are thorough and have good communication skills.

Most importantly, what I look for in a resident is very similar to what each one of us on some level aspires to achieve on a daily basis—to be motivated, knowledgeable, friendly, and able to have a positive impact on a patient's life. If you can achieve these goals, you can feel confident about your future success as a residency candidate and ultimately as a pharmacist.



Jeffery A. Goad, PharmD, University of Southern California

The five main characteristics I look for in a community pharmacy resident are motivation, vision, aptitude, flexibility, and organization.

Having a positive attitude and being self-motivated are key elements to having a successful interview and a rewarding residency experience for both the resident and the preceptor. If a

student needs to be convinced during the interview that community pharmacy is the right place for an exciting residency experience, it's going to be a long year ahead for both parties. I tell students to remember back to the days of their pharmacy school interview and be that energetic again for their residency interview! A highly motivated student will often tip the scales in his or her favor during residency selection.

Although everyone dreads writing that vision statement, it really does help to define who you are and what you want to be. Having a well-thought-out vision of where you think community pharmacy is going communicates to the program director your level of maturity and creativity, and if you're heading in a positive direction. If your vision of community pharmacy's future is to create a more efficient dispensing pharmacist and that direct patient care cannot happen in the pharmacy, you may be getting off on the wrong foot in your interview. At the other end of the spectrum, you don't want to simply tell them what you think they want to hear. Be creative and get them to share your vision.

I can teach anyone who can and wants to learn. You made it through pharmacy school, you have the basic knowledge, and you need to start a residency program. You are motivated and goal oriented, but will you have a successful residency year? Much of the answer to that question hinges on your aptitude. Can you assimilate new and old information and articulate a plan, whether it is for direct patient care or for a management project? The days of cram and purge before the big test are over. You now must become a lifelong learner and communicate your strategy.

Adapting to change will serve you well regardless of where you end up, but it is especially important in a community pharmacy

residency. Opportunities emerge rapidly, requiring you to be flexible with your time and attitude. The community pharmacy resident is a self-starter who welcomes change as an opportunity to push past his or her comfort zone.

Lastly, you have to be organized to get the maximum out of your residency year without getting overwhelmed. It's not enough to be an organized person, you have to have a plan and be able to describe it during your interview. Being organized actually allows you to experience more without getting in over your head. In a residency, there are no grades, so you'll be judged by others on what you do and how well you do it, not by what you're going to do.

A residency is about building confidence and competence and understanding they are inseparable.



Matt Osterhaus, Osterhaus Pharmacy (Iowa); Chair, APhA CPRP Advisory Committee

I am constantly in the recruiting mode for community pharmacy residents. Each interaction with a student pharmacist, regardless of current tenure, finds me on the lookout for someone with the desire and talent to make a difference in the lives of patients. Whether at a

state or national meeting, a college function, or a planned session in the pharmacy, I am scouting for potential candidates. I initially look for a student with an outgoing demeanor, a firm handshake, and a notable desire to make a difference as a pharmacist.

As the interviewing phase begins, I assess the student's transcript, CV, and application. Points are given for broad experience inside and outside pharmacy (e.g., choice of electives, variety of internship experiences). Sub-par grades are noted, especially those in clinical and communication classes. Applicants are given an opportunity to explain the circumstances if there are any academic concerns. A glimpse of their writing skills is noted in their letter of application.

During the interview, I assess the candidate's self-confidence via his or her ability to make eye contact with the interviewer and field questions from my staff. Those who show a curiosity impress me, asking me questions about unique aspects of my practice. I pose questions and scenarios that allow the candidate to share feelings on being a team player and a self-starter, which are crucial characteristics of a successful resident. I seek residents with a strong work ethic and an understanding of the time commitment the residency requires. I attempt to gauge the candidate's willingness to take responsibility for patients' health outcomes. Overriding all of this is the quality of caring. Caring envelopes compassion, kindness, respect, concern, and understanding. A resident must be passionate about his or her role as a pharmacist. In order to truly provide pharmaceutical care, a resident must be a caring pharmacist.

I seek residents who have the potential to affect my practice positively, and at the same time, I hope to leave a positive mark on their lives as a fellow pharmacist.



Jay D. Currie, PharmD, University of Iowa

Contrary to what many students may think, I do not look primarily at a student's academic performance. Success in our program, as in many programs, involves making the right match between resident and program in a variety of candidate characteristics. This match is judged not only by myself, but also by the pharmacist preceptors in our program.

Perhaps most important is the candidates' professional vision for themselves and for pharmacy. This must be compatible with what we as a program can help them achieve. It must also match with that of the pharmacists with whom they will be working in the coming year. Potential residents who have given considerable thought as to how a residency will help them progress professionally show me they are serious about pursuing a residency. The residency year is too valuable not to have a good match between resident and program in this regard.

I try to evaluate the candidate's work ethic. Residencies are rigorous programs that require hard work and long hours to complete. Grades can be a measure, but I also look on the candidate's CV for indications they have gone beyond the minimum requirement and have taken on additional activities or involvement in organizations. In cases where I have no personal experience with the candidate, letters of reference are extremely important to indicate likely future performance. I also want to see if a candidate has had relevant experiences that would help him or her to either clearly understand our program or that will help the candidate perform in our program at an exceptional level. Enthusiasm for developing new skills and a desire to dedicate themselves to another year of training assure me that residents are highly likely to succeed.

In addition to work ethic, a potential resident needs to be a well-rounded individual with a mature view of what he or she are about to enter by completing a residency. Do they have well developed interpersonal skills? Are they committed to personal improvement? Last, but certainly not least, are they personable and likely to be able to work well with the staff in the pharmacy where they complete their program?

And, yes, I do look at grades. All things being equal, academic performance is important in helping to sort through potential candidates. Performance on clinical rotations is always of interest, as is the choice of elective didactic courses and clinical rotations. Solid performance academically, combined with the characteristics discussed above, may be viewed more positively than isolated academic excellence.

Success for both the program and the resident involves finding the right match between a resident's needs, abilities, and attitudes and the program's ability to help the resident develop into a competent, confident, and caring pharmacist.