

EDITORIAL



by HARVEY A. K. WHITNEY, JR.

THE HUMAN SIDE OF A PHARMACY RESIDENT

MORE OFTEN THAN NOT PHARMACY RESIDENTS ENTER a new program in a naive condition; almost totally unsuspecting the stress they will be under for the next 2000-plus hours of their professional life. Certainly residents are told what to expect but few have an appreciation of the magnitude of what is to follow.

Preceptors spend time during the recruitment phase of a residency explaining the pitfalls and the hard work that is to ensue, but how many stop to consider the human side of a pharmacy resident. Many years ago, I learned from Paul Parker, director of pharmacy at the University of Kentucky, that a preceptor must be concerned with the complete person when training residents. Parker could not only tell you the names of all his residents and the names of their home towns, he could recite the names of their spouses and children. He could tell you where all of them were born and probably even their date of birth. In fact, there was little personal information Parker did not know about his residents because he knew that to be a good preceptor he had to know their whole life as it presently existed. Today we are learning more about holistic medicine and the importance of considering the patient's environment. Preceptors would be wise to borrow this concept and apply it to their residents.

The importance of knowing about the nonprofessional life of pharmacy residents has been illustrated to me on numerous occasions by my own experience as a preceptor. All too frequently I have found the stress of a demanding residency program has taken its toll on the family of the resident. When this happens the preceptor is forced to become involved in the personal life of the resident. It is easier to cope with these situations if the preceptor has prepared himself by knowing all about the resident's outside life.

Taking this one step further, Siegel and Donnelly writing in the *Journal of Medical Education* (November 1978, pp. 908-914) advocate establishing a support group consisting mainly of residents and some staff members to assist the intern in coping with the personal and professional problems which occur as a result of the

stress of an internship. Two of the six objectives of the support group are:

1. To acknowledge and provide support for alternative solutions to professional/personal/family role conflicts where they exist.

2. To acknowledge the need to be angry and complain while simultaneously trying to move beyond anger and complaints to constructive ways of dealing with the hospital system and the internship role.

While I have stated the preceptor should have an intimate knowledge of his resident's personal life, Siegel and Donnelly state the support group "should be removed enough from the director's scrutiny to promote openness, trust and confidentiality." This appears to be a plausible concept and would be especially important if the resident believed that the source of the problem was with the preceptor.

I am not aware of any hospital pharmacy residency program that has a formalized support group established to provide assistance to their residents. The small size of most residency programs might seem to make such a group difficult to establish. However, I believe most hospitals having a residency program would have the resources to draw upon from other departments. One or two persons from the personnel department and the psychiatry department could be used. A family counselor, medical social worker or certain types of nurses might be useful support group members. Using people from outside the department may seem disadvantageous because they will hear the complaints about the pharmacy and they will not have a thorough understanding of the department, but the advantages, I believe, far outweigh them. A person outside the department can be far more objective and can help improve not only the condition of the resident's life but can contribute to improvement of the department, for example, by pointing out behavioral problems that are unrecognized or not considered serious by the director.

A properly constituted and active support group should benefit the resident and result in an overall increase in the quality of the hospital's pharmacy service.