VIEWPOINTS

Upgrading Nontenure-track Pharmacy Practice Faculty from Second- to First-Class Citizens

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Most new pharmacy practice faculty members are appointed on a nontenure track. Without nontenure-track pharmacy practice faculty, new and established schools cannot offer quality patient-oriented pharmaceutical education. Yet, many of these valuable academicians are treated as second-class citizens. Responsibility for upgrading the rights, responsibilities, and status of nontenure-track faculty rests with deans, chairs, nontenure-track faculty members themselves, and tenure-track faculty.

Deans, working with university officials and school promotions committees, should maximize the extent to which nontenure-track faculty can be employed by the university. Discriminating employment policies that restrict participation in faculty governance or access to faculty award and development programs should be confronted. Academic freedom, accorded to tenured faculty, is equally important for nontenure-track faculty. Promotion policies that encourage progression through the ranks must be adopted and used. Job security, using extended appointment periods, will promote stability of the nontenure-track ranks and decrease faculty turnover. While some schools may require that the department chair be a tenured faculty member, many schools may benefit from nontenure-track faculty members serving as chairpersons. Changing university policy and procedures takes time. However, department changes can be immediate. Our perspectives (chair, nontenure-track track assistant professor, and tenured professor) provide ideas for upgrading the status of nontenure-track faculty.

Chair’s Perspective. Nontenure-track faculty members usually fulfill a clinician-educator role with the majority of their time devoted to clinical activities and practice-based teaching. Unlike their colleagues who are physician clinician-educators, pharmacy practice nontenure-track faculty members devote much more time to didactic instruction. Since most nontenure-track faculty members have completed residencies that focus on practice competencies, they must learn how to teach and conduct scholarship. Attainment of competence in distance education, course coordination, preparation of syllabi and lectures, problem/case-based teaching, and examination preparation are among the many development needs of nontenure-track faculty members. Annual prospective definition of the responsibilities of all nontenure-track faculty members will naturally lead to a discussion of the largest stressor: handling the conflicting demands of a practice site and the school. Constant dialogue between the school and practice partner leadership (eg, hospital pharmacy director) will promote mutual recognition of practice and academic demands.

Nontenure-track faculty members often assume school and department leadership positions. At our school, non-tenure faculty members routinely serve as committee chairs and on the Executive Committee. Several serve as associate deans. Because our department is large and spans several geographic areas, the pharmacy practice faculty (nontenure and tenure-track) function as practice teams. These self-governing practice teams are responsible for mentorship, assuring quality and consistency of teaching across the campuses (especially experiential courses), and promoting collaborative practice-based scholarship. Nontenure-track faculty members are usually elected as practice team leaders and thus serve on the Pharmacy Practice Cabinet that advises the Chair on all issues involving the faculty. The Vice Chair for Residency Programs is a nontenure-track faculty member who works collegially with the tenure-track Vice Chair for Research. Department voting rights of nontenure-track faculty are indistinguishable from those of tenure-track faculty.

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Compensation of nontenure-track faculty members increasingly involves a professional services contract or agreement. Contract negotiations that commit them or the school in general will benefit from having the input of the involved faculty member. Nontenure-track faculty members will likely develop a system to document the value of their clinical services to both the practice partner and the school. The school in turn can develop mechanisms whereby the individual faculty member is financially rewarded for maintenance of patient care contracts with compensation above the department base salary. Creation of a pharmacy income plan through which both the school and faculty member financially benefit from patient care contracts, will encourage the school to respect the faculty member's time commitment to patient care and encourage the faculty member to continue patient care. Equally important, the nontenure-track faculty member who is financially rewarded for practice will serve as a realistic role model for our students.

Non-tenure Track Faculty Perspective. Nontenure-track faculty members are encouraged to write their own detailed “job description” as a yearly development plan. This plan can be shared with the chair and the practice partner so that each clearly understands the anticipated conflicts. A balance of teaching, practice, and scholarship efforts should be defined. An anticipated weekly schedule of patient care, classroom, experiential, and school service activities will prospectively identify conflicts. Time should be set aside specifically for scholarship. Office time strictly devoted to scholarship will help the nontenure-track faculty member earn first-class citizenship, stature, and respect. To teach and practice without producing scholarly publications is unacceptable. Scholarship, though difficult to prioritize into weekly schedules, is a privilege for nontenure-track faculty. Schools are therefore obligated to provide off-service time and access to seed grants, equipment grants, and laboratory support.

Tenured Faculty Perspective. Acknowledgment of nontenure-track faculty as full members of the academy begins within the home department. Tenure-track faculty members, particularly senior faculty members, are obligated to foster and promote their nontenure-track colleagues. Advocacy through career development discussions and promotion of collaborative research is key. Senior faculty can be instrumental in avoiding a “we-they” relationship within the department. Tenured faculty members must respect the pivotal role of the clinician-educator, both in experiential education and in the overall school mission. Equally important, nontenure-track faculty members must respect the unique challenges faced by their tenure-track colleagues. Conducting peer reviewed, externally funded research demands more effort than may be readily visible to nontenure-track faculty members. While both share the stress of navigating the promotion process, the additional stress of “up or out” is sometimes not appreciated by nontenure-track faculty members.

Nontenure-track pharmacy practice faculty members are a sizable force in American pharmaceutical education. We can no longer afford to treat them fundamentally different from their tenure-track colleagues. Catalysts for changes, within the departments and schools, should include all faculty types and ranks. Our tenure-track basic science colleagues are also dependent on the maturation of nontenure-track faculty. Thus, their support in changing institutional and school policies is critical. Failure to fully embrace nontenure-track faculty as first-class academic citizens compromises the quality education our students richly deserve.

REFERENCES