Recently, I had the opportunity to read a paper by Abraham Zaleznik in the *Harvard Business Review* in which he made an interesting statement about teachers:

Great teachers take risks. They bet initially on talent they perceive in younger people. And they risk emotional involvement in working closely with their juniors. The risks do not always pay off, but the willingness to take them appears crucial in developing leaders.1

After reading this paragraph, I thought about the numerous good teachers I had encountered who made a difference in my life or in our students’ lives. Out of this group of individuals, the truly great teachers were indeed those who demonstrated their willingness and commitment to taking a risk as an educator and mentor. Each of us can certainly remember a book, film, movie, or television show where a teacher or coach identified an individual, group of individuals, or team with talent. This teacher or coach, through their determination and often emotional involvement, were able to transform lives. Not every transformation was completely successful in these stories, but the common element was that this teacher or coach also instilled the importance of being risk takers individually or collectively in his or her protégée(s).

The importance of this statement became more important as my family recently navigated through the health care system for someone who was being treated at a cancer clinic in a large and prestigious academic health center. While the care he received from the individual health care providers was excellent and first rate, what was missing was a coordinated care system. It became clear during this time that there was no single individual, to assist him and my family, in understanding the complexity of his treatment plan. For example, despite being a diabetic and hypertensive, no one (including a pharmacist) was there to coordinate his pharmacotherapeutic issues, which ranged from chemotherapy, pain management, and anti-infectives, to how to ensure control of his diabetes and hypertension after the placement of a gastric feeding tube. The various individuals and processes each showed a caring and professional attitude, but no individual seemed willing to take a risk by consulting with others involved in providing care. Furthermore, these interactions highlighted where a pharmacist can contribute as a team member in coordinating patient care in a health care team.

Given the opportunity to directly observe patient care, the statement about *great teachers taking risks* took on even more importance in the context of our current system of health care education and practice. I started to ponder to what extent each of us as pharmacy educators and administrators is willing to take risks, and to what extent do we instill this willingness to take risks in those we teach or mentor? Furthermore, how do we model for our students or mentees a willingness to take risks in working with others or to tackle potential opportunities? Taking risks, certainly, should never be done recklessly or haphazardly. Rather, we as scholars must utilize our intellect, professional experiences, and available resources as the foundation for evaluating whether we should take such a risk and then utilize existing information and evidence to decide on our course of action when taking this risk. This happens every day in our classrooms, laboratories, and practice settings, but do we take the time to discuss risks and risk taking with our students and mentees? I ask each of us to consider how willing we are to teach/mentor talented pharmacy students and other individuals, knowing that this process, to be truly successful, often necessitates time and emotional involvement, and in some cases will result in disappointment despite our wishes and best-intended efforts.

Risk taking takes on an even greater importance in the evolving health care arena. As educators, to what extent are we willing to take a risk as a leader in ensuring our students will be involved in interdisciplinary education? To what extent are we willing to take a risk as a leader for the development and improvement of current and/or innovative practice sites despite resistance by other individuals or groups? For example, with the continually evolving Medicare system, pharmacy has a great opportunity to advance patient care and safety by being a key player in medication therapy management. But this

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transition will not be without risk, particularly the risk associated with stepping out of one’s own comfort zone and challenging existing paradigms. Equally important, we need to involve our students as these programs are developed so that they can see what it means to take a risk, the commitment and passion needed for the process, and its disappointments and successes. The development of the next generation of teachers, practitioners, and researchers must involve our willingness to take risks and to show these individuals the value of taking risks. History, time after time, will remind us that it was those individuals who were willing to take risks—even risks that involved an emotional component—and who were not successful, that ultimately led to great achievement or advances.

So, I would ask each of you to consider to what extent you are willing to take a risk as an educator, researcher, or practitioner or administrator. It is certainly recognized that these risks, whether mentoring a student, resident, fellow, or junior faculty colleague; developing new opportunities; or changing an existing paradigm, require time, a commodity that seems to be in short supply in our academy. In taking these risks we may be at odds with other individuals and ingrained systems. Yet, perhaps one of the most important components in risk taking is that each of these activities often requires our passion and commitment, and in many cases, our emotional involvement as we work toward success. And again, sometimes these activities, despite our best intentions and efforts, do not result in the successful outcome we had anticipated. Risk taking, commitment, emotional involvement, and possibly disappointment, must be a part of the culture in our colleges and schools as we teach/mentor pharmacy students, residents, fellows, and junior faculty members. Perhaps risk taking is what in the end distinguishes a good teacher from a great teacher.

REFERENCES