

## VIEWPOINTS

### **Sabbaticals: The Key to Sharpening our Professional Skills as Educators, Scientists, and Clinicians**

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A passage in Ecclesiastes (10:10) emphasizes the importance of sabbaticals in our professional and personal life. "If your ax is dull and its edge unsharpened, more strength is needed; but skill will bring us success." Sabbaticals have a long history and have been one of the defining elements of academic life. Kang and Miller provided an excellent historical perspective on the origins of sabbaticals in higher education.<sup>1</sup> The initial concept of a sabbatical or a time of rest is reported to have originated in Hebrew legend from the word "shabat," an ancient river that flowed for 6 days and rested on the seventh day. This concept of a break or leave every 7 years was the foundation for the development of sabbaticals in education, allowing for a time when a professor was not expected to teach, but rather have an opportunity for rejuvenation and restoration. Harvard University first developed a sabbatical program in 1880. Since that time, there has been enormous growth in the availability of sabbatical programs as documented by a report in 1992 indicating approximately 75% of all private and public 2- and 4-year institutions offer some form of a sabbatical program.<sup>1</sup>

The benefits of a sabbatical for a faculty member and for their school/college have been documented in the general higher education and pharmacy education literature.<sup>2-5</sup> Yet, the utilization of this important resource seems to be missing in the culture associated with professional education, given our current academic environment of larger enrollments, increased demands for faculty scholarship and clinical services and the challenges associated with the recruitment and retention of faculty members. This leads one to question whether pharmacy education needs to develop alternative mechanisms and sabbatical formats to allow faculty members the opportunity to enhance their skills as educators, scholars, and clinicians.

The most common type of sabbatical involves a leave of either 1 year at half-time salary or 6 months at full-time salary. Faculty members often need to apply through their departments, school, college, or university for this leave and may be asked to document their enhanced productiv-

ity as a function of the leave. Sabbaticals allow faculty members time to conduct research, write, study a particular area, develop a research focus, learn a new technique, conduct reviews and art work, or work on courses and curriculum.<sup>6</sup> While these justifications seem reasonable and are often utilized by faculty members in the pharmaceutical and clinical sciences, faculty members whose primary responsibilities are clinical care and teaching would only fit into the category of developing and working on new courses and curriculum and learning new research techniques.

Perhaps now is the time that we as an academy need to rethink the format for sabbatical opportunities for all faculty members in our schools and colleges of pharmacy. Clinicians, for example, may benefit from a mini-sabbatical of 1-2 months, or should be allowed some form of sabbaticals at all academic ranks. Short-term sabbaticals could allow a faculty member to visit clinical sites demonstrating innovative practice, opportunities where clinicians could collaborate in patient care at their own site in the absence of students, opportunities where clinical educators could learn new techniques to enhance their skills as educators with minimal teaching responsibilities so they could write manuscripts or grant applications. The latter 2 justifications could also apply to faculty members involved in pharmaceutical or clinical science research. Furthermore, perhaps our junior faculty members can benefit from the opportunity to conduct a short-term sabbatical leave after 3 to 4 years in the academy, while more senior faculty members could have the opportunity for longer sabbaticals. It is essential that faculty members should have the opportunity to individualize sabbaticals in accordance with their professional goals as they relate to their teaching, research, clinical, and service responsibilities.

With escalating demands on faculty members in scholarly, teaching, and service activities, with pressure to obtain extramural funding or clinical revenues, larger enrollments, increased requirements for active-learning activities and experiential learning in our curriculum

and decreased faculty size, it is not surprising that faculty retention is a mounting problem in pharmacy education. Individual faculty members across the academy need an opportunity to enhance their skills and expertise, independent of whether these are related to research, teaching, or clinical practice. Some will argue that sabbatical leave programs place additional manpower strains on our programs. Certainly, the processes associated with sabbatical leaves must be equitable and fair for all faculty members in the college or school. However, a well crafted and constructed program of innovative sabbatical leaves at all academic ranks would have profound benefits in the morale and productivity of faculty members. JoLaine Draugalis, in her 2005 Presidential address, reminded our academy of the importance of the basic 3 Rs: recruitment, retention and renewal.<sup>7</sup> As our professional lives become more hectic and challenging, we each need more strength and tools to be successful; we need a time for renewal or the chance to sharpen our ax to ensure future success.

It is time to give serious attention to this issue and to bring back to life the opportunity for sabbatical leaves for all our faculty members. What do we know about the frequency and opportunities for sabbaticals or the perceived or real barriers to taking a sabbatical? What are

you doing in your college or school or for our academy to resurrect sabbatical opportunities for all?

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