

Leveraging Social Media for Recruiting Community Preceptors in Medical Education

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To the Editor:

Dr Lund et al, in their recent article "Identifying Barriers to Precepting Health Professions Learners During the COVID-19 Pandemic," shed light on the increased difficulties in engaging and retaining community preceptors caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.¹ This ongoing challenge led us to explore alternative strategies to address the issue. As course directors for the first-year doctoring course (Practice of Medicine, POM) at Baylor College of Medicine, we leveraged social media to improve our recruitment of community preceptors. Our POM course places a strong emphasis on developing early clinical skills, like history taking and physical examination, to prepare students to interact confidently with patients from the outset of their careers. Our educational approach integrates diverse instructional formats, including large and small group sessions focused on practical skills acquisition, supplemented by hands-on training with real patients facilitated by community preceptors.

Medical education relies heavily on the involvement of volunteer community preceptors who provide invaluable real-world experience to students. Every year, our first-year class consists of approximately 190 students, and we enlist over 140 preceptors to ensure our students gain a robust clinical experience. However, recruiting preceptors who are willing and capable of fulfilling this role has posed ongoing challenges.² Traditional recruitment methods, like emails, while effective to an extent, often fall short of reaching a sufficiently wide and diverse audience of health care professionals.

Social Media as a Recruitment Tool

Recognizing the need for a more proactive approach, we turned to social media as a strategic recruitment tool. Platforms like WhatsApp and Facebook offered us unprecedented access to a vast network of health care professionals across the Greater Houston area. By joining and actively participating in relevant physician groups and forums, we were able to directly engage with potential preceptors, disseminate information about our program, and invite expressions of interest. Most of these groups are private, with members being carefully vetted and admitted only if they possess an active license to practice. This method of recruitment proved cost-effective, requiring minimal financial investment aside from dedicated time and effort.

Building Relationships and Fostering Interest

Beyond its reach and affordability, social media facilitated meaningful interactions with prospective preceptors.^{3,4} Through posts, comments, and direct messages, we initiated dialogues that not only informed but also inspired interest in the role of community preceptorship. Personalized communication allowed us to highlight the professional benefits of becoming a preceptor, such as opportunities for mentorship, professional

development through teaching, and networking within the medical community.

Moreover, social media served as a platform for current preceptors to share their positive experiences and testimonials. These endorsements, visible to potential recruits within our social networks, played a crucial role in influencing others to consider participating in our educational mission.

Through the utilization of social media, we effectively recruited and sustained in-person preceptor visits amidst the COVID -19 pandemic. Our experience highlights the transformative impact of social media on recruiting community preceptors in medical education. By leveraging its strengths in connectivity, engagement, and targeted communication, we successfully expanded our preceptorship network.

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