

We have all heard the famous line from Mary Poppins that “a spoonful of sugar helps the medicine go down”. Apparently, the same can be said when educating students. The University of Wyoming (UW) School of Pharmacy awarded two Preceptors of the Year for the 2021-22 academic year. Pharmacist, Sammy Ihunwaeze, who precepts students at North Suburban Medical Center in Thornton, CO was one of the award recipients. Sammy has been described by his students as “enthusiastic”, “very caring”, “a great personality that is educational, funny, and fun to be around an” and “overall great pharmacist and person”. It’s comments such as these that enticed us to learn more about Dr. Ihunwaeze and what makes him such a respected and beloved preceptor.

Sammy always knew he wanted to work in a hospital. He started as a pharmacy technician in a long-term care pharmacy after graduating from the Front Range Community College (FRCC) Pharmacy Technician program in the summer of 2006. From there he worked as a pharmacy and IV technician which combined both retail and hospital pharmacy environments. It was during this time he thought about going into medicine, but because he loved what he was doing, he decided pharmacy was the path for him. Sammy enrolled in pre-pharmacy classes at FRCC and then applied to pharmacy school at the University of Wyoming where he was accepted into the program in 2010. When he graduated in May of 2014 he went to work at North Suburban Medical Center and has been there ever since.

It was just one year after starting at North Suburban Medical Center that Sammy became a preceptor. He really likes teaching and even thought about going into academia. As a preceptor, he gets to combine his love of teaching with his love of hospital pharmacy. Not only does he mentor students from the University of Wyoming, he also works with students from Regis, UCHHealth, Nebraska and Kansas. Sammy collaborates with other pharmacists at North Suburban Medical Center in teaching students, but all University of Wyoming students are assigned to him.

When given the opportunity, Sammy likes to pair P2 and P4 students together. This is something he learned when he was a pharmacy student. When he was a P2 student, he was paired with a P4 student and it gave him a great deal of confidence. When he returned to school in the fall he felt that the confidence he gained really set him apart from his peers, and so he continues that teaching strategy with his students. Another experience he had as a student was being on a rotation where his preceptor never spent time with him. Because of this, Sammy makes time for his students and engages them in many activities to help them learn. He also understands that some students struggle in the hospital environment, so he patiently works with those students to help show them what they know and to help them learn. Another strategy he uses with struggling students is to enlist the help of his colleagues. Sammy has found that sometimes students feel a lot of pressure to impress him since he is their preceptor, but that they will open up to other pharmacists at the site. By having all the pharmacists at the site working as a team with their students, students get the support and positive learning environment in which they can succeed.

The thing Sammy loves the most about being a preceptor is making a difference in his students' lives and contributing to their growth as learners and healthcare professionals. He understands that the pharmacy profession is always evolving, so he tries to help shape his students so they can adapt to the ever-changing environment in which they will work. He tries to make a connection with his students on the first day of the rotation, where he spends the entire day orienting them to the site. It is during this time that expectations are established, and students begin incorporation into everything pharmacists do at the site from attending codes, spending time in the emergency room, or assisting with traumas, if possible. Another bonus for Sammy is that he learns from his students. He feels they ask really good questions, which helps him to learn and grow in the profession through analysis and discussion.

When asked what his biggest strength is, Sammy says it is his personality. He is passionate about and enjoys his position as an Advanced Clinical Pharmacist, and he loves to teach students about what he does. He is definitely a "people person" and it's this quality that really allows him to connect with his students. Even in a sometimes-stressful work and learning environment, Sammy makes things seem not so bad. Just like a spoonful of sugar.