

The Best Possible Site Visit



Many people participate in family medicine clerkship site visits. It is a good time to examine ways site visits can continue to be beneficial for both the visitor and the visited. The purpose of the site visit is three-fold:

1. Sharing new ideas for teaching medical students and family medicine

The site visitor is exposed to a practice that is not his or her own and with it, different styles of teaching third year medical students. It is easy to become completely involved in the methodology for clinical instruction of the physician's home institution. Past site visitors have found new ideas for offering feedback, different opportunities for students to see specific patient populations or possibilities for clinical innovation. This is also a different, but meaningful way to interact with students in regard to the entire clerkship experience.

2. Helping sites access their own strengths and areas needing improvement

The observation of a site with the express purpose of looking at its strengths and weaknesses. This is important because we want to ensure that students are having the best possible experience at all clerkship sites. While each site will have unique opportunities based on the community and population it serves, there are specific parts of the clerkship that should be uniform.

3. Providing UW support for sites

The UW Department of Family Medicine is able to support site teaching efforts in a variety of ways. We may be able to provide faculty development tailored to the site's needs during or after the site visit. We may be able to provide information on instruction about resources such as the Health Sciences Library, First Class or our web sites.

4. Reinforcing our appreciation to site faculty and staff for working year in and year out with our students.

The Visitor

We greatly appreciate our faculty's willingness to assist us in our continual improvement of the clerkship by visiting the clerkship sites. Having the perspective of another site coordinator is invaluable as he or she may be able to offer specific clinical insights or helpful hints. The visitor plays an important role from the perspective of being able to assess a site's needs and offer that site assistance in meeting goals and addressing needs for the clerkship. Here are some things to consider on behalf of the visitor:

- ✓ *Set up your schedule.* After you have established a date that works for you and the site, the clerkship coordinator will work with the site to set up a specific schedule for your day at the site. This may include special needs by the site.

For example: Is there a particular faculty development talk that you would feel comfortable giving? If the site is interested in a different topic, would you be able to lead a discussion given the proper support from the clerkship team in Seattle?

- ✓ *Book your travel.* There are very specific rules for traveling for site visits. Please use the website for specific information: <http://www.washington.edu/admin/travel/>. If you have questions, contact the clerkship coordinator.
- ✓ *Preliminary research.* The clerkship coordinator will send out a packet that includes the site description, the site visit letter from the last visit and various materials associated with the clerkship. It may also be helpful to do some basic research about the location of the site, both for logistical purposes and for background about the student's experience.

- ✓ *Framing your mindset.* When going on the visit, think about some of the topics that have come up in the clerkship over the past year. What specific topics have come up during EOQs? What items have received special attention?
- ✓ *Talking to the visit participants.* In order to have an earnest conversation with the student, it is important to make sure that he or she knows that this is not an evaluation of the student. Also, emphasize that the results of the visit will not be sent to the site until the student's grade has been submitted. It is a good idea to think about the student in the context of the greater medical community. The questionnaire is a guideline for talking to the student and should be sent back to the office in Seattle with the letter. When talking to other members of staff, it is important to make sure that any concerns or questions they have are addressed or at least directed to the right person. Many visitors treat students to a meal during their conversation.

The Visited

Sites have commented that after some initial hesitation, they have come to view the site visit as a great opportunity to connect with other members of the clerkship community.

- ✓ *You aren't being dissected.* While the visitor is looking at the site's specifics, he or she is thinking more along the lines of what the site's particular strengths are, as well as areas where improvement can happen. Even in the areas to improve, the visitor is coming to the site to assist you with making change in whatever capacity is most comfortable for you.
- ✓ *It's about your needs.* One site coordinator talked about the idea that a visitor was bringing CME to him and how this was a benefit. The visit can contain teaching aids that are specific to the site's needs. This may mean a discussion tailored to the site's CME interest or it could be a discussion on some aspect of precepting or instructing the students. This may include questions about computing needs and library resources or materials covered in past EOQs.
- ✓ *Get to know your fellow coordinator.* The site visit can provide the opportunity for socializing. Whether this is through a dinner before the actual visit or at lunch the day of the visit, take the time to talk to each other.

Feedback

The visitor should submit a completed letter and questionnaire to Missy Gleckel in Seattle. This letter should highlight the site's specific strengths and address up to 3 areas of improvement. The site coordinator of the site being visited should expect to receive a letter detailing the visit within six weeks. Please remember that copies of the letter and questionnaire will not be sent to the site until the student's grade has been submitted. Don't forget to tell the student (multiple times) that he or she is not being evaluated!

Thank you for participating in our site visits!