

# To Be or Not to Be: An Investigation into the incentives and barriers impacting clinical preceptorship in family medicine

## **Abstract**

**Purpose:** Clinical preceptors serve a vital role in medical education, as they guide medical students in the process of applying theoretical scientific knowledge in the clinical setting. However, recruiting and retaining clinical preceptors, especially in Family Medicine, is a growing challenge for U.S. medical schools. This study aimed to investigate the incentives and barriers family medicine physicians at the University of Colorado School of Medicine (CUSOM) face when deciding to serve as clinical preceptors and explain why these physicians become, remain, and/or stop serving as preceptors.

**Method:** A cross-sectional survey was distributed to 376 family medicine physicians associated with CUSOM who were active clinical teachers, had been clinical teachers in the past, or were associated with practices that historically had taken medical student learners, with a 60.6% response rate. For single-choice, closed-ended survey questions, descriptive statistics were calculated. For the open-ended questions, a thematic analysis approach was adopted.

**Results:** The results revealed that intrinsic motivators, such as a love for teaching (76.6%), a sense of duty to the profession (67.8%) and relationships with students (58.5%) were the primary reasons for serving as preceptors. Conversely, extrinsic factors, most predominantly time, were the largest barriers to teaching current (80.0%) and potential (51.3%) preceptors faced.

**Conclusions:** Family medicine physicians largely balance intrinsic motivators against extrinsic barriers when deciding whether to clinically precept medical students. While CUSOM's recent switch to a full Longitudinal Integrated Clerkship model does have the potential to amplify the impact of these intrinsic motivators, addressing the preceptor shortage may require focus on the motivators that preceptors report as most meaningful, and minimizing the impact of the time burden of teaching. The authors recommend further work to assess the impact of changes in preceptor recruitment and retention in response to work in the specific areas highlighted by the participants.