

Notes for the Primary Care Teachers THE EFFECTIVE TEACHER

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Most of us are not taught to be a teacher but a clinician. The motto of 'see one, do one and teach one' is still very much practised in our settings. In order to become competent and caring doctors-cum-teachers while living in this era of information explosion, we must learn effective ways to teach. So how can we accomplish that?

Effective teaching emphasises the three-step process of planning, teaching and reflection.¹ Planning teaching depends on the learners' levels, because learners at different levels have different learning needs² and learning settings. It is paramount to plan and organise teaching material and to present it cogently and imaginatively. Early planning can facilitate maximum student exposure and linkage to clinical practices. Teaching modules and lecture and tutorial material can be uploaded onto a website and updated regularly to reflect the relevance and advances in the topic. Internet-based interactive learning is becoming important now as it allows distance learning and accessibility.

A survey of students and residents in the US indicated that the most important characteristics of ambulatory care teachers were active involvement of learners, promotion of learner autonomy and demonstration of patient care skills.³ An understanding of the principle of adult learning helps the teacher facilitate the process of learning, individualise lessons, and make lessons more learner-centred, active and experiential.⁴

Learning to use different teaching aids and employing different teaching methods enable a teacher to develop his or her own style of presentation that interests the learners. These methods include clinical teaching, supervisory one-to-one teaching or preceptorship, videotaping consultations and feedback, chart reviews, group clinical audits, examination skills, procedural skills, small and large group teaching, tutorials, reflective practice, peer group discussions, and presentations. Formal training allows

clinical teachers to explore the use of appropriate teaching methods.

In addition to this, the teacher needs to employ different teaching skills including establishing rapport, identifying learning opportunities, setting goals, questioning, feedback and reflection to enhance and facilitate teaching.⁴ In teaching a large group, good classroom management should be practised for all sessions and the seating plan changed for different learning outcomes.

During the process of teaching, the teacher needs to first create a warm atmosphere or establish learner-teacher rapport. Interact with learners but still have command of the class in a group setting and politely encourage learners' participation, questions and opinions. Stay focused on the limited teaching agenda developed for each teaching encounter and remain learner-centered.⁵ The teacher has to remain clear in his or her delivery of content. Use questions, role modelling and observation with feedback to promote learning.⁵

Learners value immediate and clear corrective feedback and discussion on clinical reasoning.^{1,2,6} Teachers should be able to discuss based on evidence and recent studies and developments or provide references or resources where relevant to facilitate and encourage students to search for related subjects. The teacher should constantly check the students' understanding of the subjects taught and students should be asked to give examples of application or other clinical scenarios. One should invite constructive criticism and challenge the thinking and ideas brought up while encouraging the students to emulate the same in a learned community and respond positively. Timely constructive feedback increases student motivation and drives learning. Positive suggestions about students' work indicates both that the teacher cares for his or her students and that their work is worthy of the teacher's attention, thus gaining students'

trust. This does not mean only praise should be given but any critical matters should be raised in an overall supportive context in which mutual trust and learning content are fulfilled.

Teachers also need to be observant of the flow and dynamic of the class while paying attention to details. Often there are dominant members in a group. While taking note of the dominant members in the class, the teacher has to encourage and invite the quieter members to take part in discussion. One needs to adapt and tailor teaching to the needs of individual students or students in a bigger group.

An effective teacher has to learn how to stimulate the development of critical thinking among students while keeping their curiosity aroused. We need to empower the student to learn. To achieve this, peer-teaching and lessons that revolve around their prior knowledge, small group discussion and student reflection are useful. Appropriate assessment improves student-learning outcomes, and students need help in assessing existing knowledge and competency. In designing modules, tasks and assignments, extensive formative assessment needs to be built in to cultivate student attributes such as problem-solving and critical thinking. All assessment components need to be aligned with the content of the modules. An outline of the modules or topics should be provided.

At the end of a class or session, students need the chance to reflect on what they have learned and what they still need to know. They should be asked to reflect on the major points of the presented lecture or tutorial and to answer some questions. A summary can be given immediately to emphasise the main lecture content or clarify misconception. Any further queries are followed up in subsequent classes or sessions.

An effective teacher is a positive role model for the learners. A clinical teacher role model is seen as someone knowledgeable, clinically competent and confident, demonstrates teaching responsiveness, has good rapport with patients and emphasises the importance of the doctor-patient relationship and psychosocial aspects of cases.⁴ The teacher must constantly update his or her knowledge and skills in his or her areas to keep abreast of recent developments in evidence so that he or she can guide and facilitate the students.

A review of clinical teaching revealed one of the characteristics of an effective teacher is personal attributes.⁴ The effective teacher possesses some or all of the following characteristics: enthusiastic, inspirational, motivational, charismatic, creative, practical, well organised, respectable, approachable, friendly, humorous, warm, supportive, able to relate to real life situations, enjoys teaching and is a good communicator. Some of these personal attributes are inherent but most can be acquired and learned. The effective teacher believes his subject is the most exciting, engaging and fascinating topic in the world. Whenever his subject is unfolded, his adrenaline soars, his pulse quickens, his eyes widen, and his students cannot help but to ride the wave of his enthusiasm and the journey of exploration for that moment, and occasionally, for life. In medical teaching, the teacher's aim is to facilitate students in gaining knowledge through this exciting exploration, and finally transforming them into self-motivated learners. In order to carry out all the above tasks effectively, the teacher has to possess good communication skills. Non-verbal communication skills such as eye contact and gestures, as well as verbal communication skills should be used to facilitate discussion and to reflect. Excellent listening and speaking skills allow the teacher to encourage active participation, interaction and establishing rapport.

In conclusion, an effective teacher is someone who can impart his or her knowledge and skills successfully and is able to bring about appropriate changes in knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviours in the learners.

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