COMMENTARY

Teaching in the healthcare setting

Kay Mohanna

The importance of developing a learning culture in the NHS has been recognised to enable skill mix, sharing of good practice and the capacity to learn from errors. Learning is linked with the implementation of good clinical governance strategies.

The impact of continuing changes in, and modernisation of, healthcare is being felt by all those involved in training and education in a healthcare setting. The need for high quality teaching staff was reinforced by commitments to education and training in the NHS Plan which emphasised continuous professional development, lifelong learning, increasing training commissions for doctors, nurses and allied health professions, interprofessional learning and working, and preparation of students and staff for new roles and new ways of working.¹

In August 2004 the requirements of the European Working Time Directive for doctors and dentists in training were implemented. With this came significant changes in patterns of service delivery which impact on time available for teaching and training.

Under the influence of Modernising Medical Careers, we are seeing wholesale

changes in organisation of the postgraduate development of doctors. In September 2005 the Postgraduate Medical Education and Training Board took over responsibility from the Joint Committee on Postgraduate Training for General Practice and the Specialist Training Authority of the Medical Royal Colleges. Rigorous standards have been developed for entry to training,² within the nine generic domains of training,³ the curriculum in each specialty⁴ and the assessment processes.⁵

These changes extend the need to ensure that we have teaching staff with appropriate training and qualifications, as well as flexibility, experience and commitment to deliver education and training to support contemporary health care. They also require more robust arrangements for mentorship and feedback to teachers about their abilities and strengths as well as training in the

rigorous application of assessment techniques, to ensure benefits for students and the student experience.

The role of the healthcare professional as teacher is increasingly recognised as:

*"A core professional activity, that cannot be left to chance, aptitude or inclination."*⁶

For seven years now Staffordshire University Faculty of Health and Sciences has been responding to that need with a "Training the Trainers" programme. In 2004 the established postgraduate certificate in medical education was extended to a full Masters programme for healthcare teachers.

As part of these courses, students are encouraged to develop an area of personal interest in independent studies modules. Independent study modules are created by the learners themselves and submitted for university approval before implementation. They are coherent units of study designed to achieve specified, assessed learning outcomes.

Independent study modules are attractive to learners who are responding to the challenge of developing or widening their roles in healthcare, who wish to structure personal scholarly activity within a formal framework, and are interested in problems which cut across traditional boundaries and are not studied elsewhere on a taught Masters award. The modules allow learners to capitalise on work place learning and continual professional updating.

Box 1: Independent study at Staffordshire University

Learners are required to:

- Demonstrate a systematic understanding of the knowledge, skills and values pertinent to medical education and the underpinning principles of adult, self directed learning (**Knowledge and Understanding**)
- Demonstrate the independent learning ability required to advance their knowledge and understanding of medical education and to develop new skills of reflective practice and problem solving to a high level for continuing professional development (**Learning**)
- Evaluate and critique techniques applicable to, and identify areas suitable for, advanced scholarship in aspects of medical education (**Enquiry**)
- Demonstrate a critical awareness and evaluation of contemporary problems and/or new insights in medical education (**Analysis**)
- Evaluate educational issues both systematically and creatively, make sound judgements and employ appropriate decision-making in complex and unpredictable situations, especially in situations where clinical teachers perform different roles that may conflict (**Problem solving**)
- Demonstrate high levels of communication skills as a teacher, incorporating empathy and the skill of facilitation, especially when dealing with under-performance (**Communication**)
- Apply educational theory and build on an understanding of that theory to develop teaching techniques that are appropriate for the particular constraints of teaching in the clinical setting (**Application**)
- Demonstrate the ability to reflect on personal values and practice and use that as a basis for self development as a teacher. To be able to use those skills of reflection to demonstrate personal responsibility, self-direction and originality in tackling and solving problems (**Reflection**).

The aims of the award are summarised in box 1 and the brackets refer to the masters level learning outcomes in the national university masters framework.⁷

Over the next few months, this journal plans a series of papers, developed from the independent work of learners on the Masters in Medical Education at Staffordshire. This work covers some of the important issues facing us as healthcare teachers and reflects the particular perspective of the authors' workplace. As an introduction to this series, a further paper⁸ appears in this issue.

The hope when setting up the award was that we could provide support to

learners facing almost constant change in their professional life. We wanted to motivate and encourage healthcare teachers to develop their role. We hope that this series can build on that, and will provide information, set challenges and stimulate debate.

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