

FREE* Newsletter

*(Faculty Resources for Educational Excellence)

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Quote of the Month

“Autonomy is often pitted against supervision as if they are two ends of a continuum, with the goal of moving from one end of the spectrum to the other during training. This depiction fails to acknowledge that autonomy and supervision can and should coexist” (Daniel J. Schumacher, MD).



*“How Can I Give Better
Feedback to my Students?”*

Feedback in Medical Education

Feedback is often viewed as a difficult task by teachers of clinical medicine. Sometimes, it is conspicuous in its absence but hard to recognize when it is done well. There is often a “disconnect” between teachers & learners about whether feedback was given or received. Feedback is defined as *“information about someone’s current performance that can be used to improve it in the future”*¹. Surprisingly little research has been done concerning feedback and how best to give it. Like any other teaching skill, feedback takes practice & experience; BUT, it’s not as difficult as it appears.

There are five principles associated with giving feedback that may help the teacher gain better insight:

1. **Expectations:** learners must know what they are expected to know and/or do while on a given rotation or learning experience; otherwise, feedback will not work no matter how well it is given. This simple rule is violated surprisingly often!
2. **Timeliness:** feedback should be given as soon as feasible, before the memory of the learning event fades. This can be challenging during busy clinical rotations. The setting of the feedback should be private and the information should be presented calmly.
3. **Specificity:** limit feedback to behaviors that have been observed personally. Feedback should focus on behaviors, i.e., decisions and actions observed, not interpretations of behavior or intentions.
4. **Clarity:** feedback should be phrased in clear, non-evaluative language and limited to behaviors that can be changed. Learners should come away with specific corrective steps that can be taken.
5. **Collegiality:** Stay out of “attack mode” when giving feedback. Focus on the behavior, not on the person. Begin with a question: “how do you think it went today?” or similar.

Remember, the purpose of feedback is to improve learning and must be related to the learning objectives. A final recommendation: use the word “feedback” often (e.g., “can I give you some feedback?”) to help the learner recognize it. Happy teaching – and let us know how we can help!

David Musick, PhD

References:

1. Whitman N. The Chief Resident as Manager. Whitman Associates, 1993.