

# Virginia Tech Carilion School of Medicine

## FREE\* Newsletter

\*(Faculty Resources for Educational Excellence)

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Vol. 1, No. 2  
December 2013

#### Quote of the Month

"Medical educators have a responsibility to foster a learning environment that equally enables all students to succeed" (Brenda Beagan)

"The connection between teaching & learning is so profound, it is surprising that teaching hospitals are not called learning hospitals" (David Pencheon)



*"What does the term  
'Learning Environment' really  
mean?"*

### ***The Learning Environment (Part One)***

The term "**learning environment**" is popular these days in health professions educational programs. For example, accreditation standards for medical schools talk about the need to conduct a medical education program "in an environment that fosters the intellectual challenge & spirit of inquiry appropriate to a community of scholars" and to ensure that "its learning environment promotes the development of explicit & appropriate professional attributes in its medical students"<sup>1</sup>. What is meant by the term "learning environment" (LE)?

In one of the few scholarly articles in academic medicine devoted to this topic, a team of authors<sup>2</sup> reviewed the literature and characterized the LE of a given educational setting as having three distinct elements:

1. **Personal development or goal dimensions:** this domain pertains to achieving the aims of education. An educational environment scoring high on this domain is characterized by clarity about learning objectives, learning content and how constructive criticism is given to students.
2. **Relationship dimensions:** this domain pertains to positive relationships in educational settings, reflected in such things as open & effective communication, friendliness, social and interpersonal support, cohesion and feelings of group spirit. Dimensions in this regard might include level of student & faculty engagement, affiliation with the school's "brand", professionalism and support for the educational mission.
3. **System maintenance & change dimensions:** this domain pertains to order, organization, rule clarity, teacher authority, student influence and innovation. Since the clinical learning environment is part of a work setting, work pressure and physical comfort are also relevant.

To some extent, the term "learning environment" as applied to medical schools & residency training programs is still evolving; not much research exists on how the LE contributes to educational outcomes. So, how does one ensure a positive LE? Look for more information about this topic in next month's newsletter. **Hope everyone has a healthy and happy holiday season!**

**David Musick, PhD**

#### References:

1. Liaison Committee on Medical Education, Standards IS-13 and MS 31-A.
2. Schonrock-Adema J et al. Key Elements in Assessing the Educational Environment: Where is the Theory? *Advances in Health Sciences Education* 2012; 17 (5): 727-42.