Clinical feedback mechanisms in an academic setting

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Introduction

Formative feedback is essential to students’ learning and progression (Schwartz, 2017). It allows students to reflect on their performance and consider how to make improvements (QAA, 2018). All medical ultrasound students attend a formative session at the university to assess several areas of practice and skills development during their fifth month of training. This poster aims to share some of the methods used.

Method

Viva Voce using clinical images from real cases
• A formative viva voce assessment assists students to link theory to practice (Schwartz, 2017), whilst preparing them for their final summative clinical and academic assessments. Many students find the viva type assessment stressful (Knight et al., 2016), so opportunities to practice are highly valued.
• One to one

Clinical skills and support
• Using simulation and questions staff can assess students’ clinical skills, such as hand-eye coordination, ability to obtain correct sections and manipulate controls.
• It provides a safe space for students to discuss the level of support they are receiving from the clinical department.
• Feedback is provided to clinical staff.
• One to one

Communication skills
• Scenarios are used during a role play session to help the student to develop their skills in delivering difficult news, preparing them for their future role (Eason and Harrison, 2017)
• Peer feedback on participants’ interactions which allows students to practice their feedback skills and share inter-professional knowledge
• Small group session

Discussion

Formative feedback is important for progress and success in a Higher Education setting (QAA, 2018). With course retention becoming increasingly important, opportunities to promote formative feedback are essential. Within communication skills group work, students reflect on their own thoughts and feelings to give feedback to their peers on the wording used when delivering difficult news (Image 1). Students can find role play uncomfortable (Eason and Harrison, 2017). Using small groups and peer feedback, combined with the support of an experienced lecturer could help to lessen anxiety that students may feel about giving feedback to their peers, thus encourage the student to utilise the feedback received (Cartney, 2010). The ability to give constructive feedback to build trust and encourage learning development, rather than being detrimental to learning (Haure et al., 2014) is an important skill for all.

Students can practice for their summative clinical assessments during the viva. This method allows identification of students who need additional support (QAA, 2018). Formative assessment of the students’ clinical ability using simulation (Image 2) is widely used (Tolsgaard and Chalouhi, 2018), however some students find the simulator difficult to use. Further research is needed in this area.

Conclusion

Information about knowledge or skills gaps, identified during these formative sessions, assists the programme team to work with students to develop action plans in association with clinical colleagues in practice. The nature of the sessions also enables students to develop reflective skills, by challenging them to identify strengths or weaknesses in their own learning.

Despite being time consuming, formative assessment of clinical ability and reasoning, using simulation, provides additional individual feedback on communication skills and ergonomics.

References


Image 1: Examples of Students’ feedback on the communication scenarios:
I like
• Do you want me to show you what I can see?
• Calm approach
• Clear, concise

I’m not sure
• Don’t worry/try not to worry
• It’s a tough time
• Everything is fine, except...

I don’t like
• Speaking rapidly
• Limited eye contact
• Too much information
• Taking over the patient

Image 2: A student using the simulator