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‘Tutoring the tutors’ – development and implementation of a ‘train the (clinical skills) tutor’ workshop

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Introduction/background:
Medical education increasingly uses small-group tutorials in clinical skills laboratories to teach clinical and procedural skills early in the curriculum. These sessions are often staffed by casual Clinical Tutors, drawn from various clinical backgrounds. Clinicians vary in their effectiveness as teachers, with many lacking formal training. As a relatively new teaching modality, even experienced tutors’ comfort and expertise with this format is often limited, particularly in medical curricula utilising systems-based and problem-based learning (PBL) techniques. The current literature focuses mainly on training PBL tutors rather than clinical skills tutors.

Purpose/objectives:
On employing our second cohort of Clinical Tutors at the Deakin University medical course, we set out to develop a workshop for tutors based on their perceived areas of weakness, rather than what faculty thought they ought to know.

Methods
Issues raised by our first cohort of Clinical Tutors and those identified by the Year 1 Tutor Coordinator, formed the content of the workshop. The workshop was run as a day-long program, which qualified for Continuing Professional Development points for Fellows of the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners. Content included applicability of adult learning principles to tutoring, role plays on dealing with ‘difficult’ students, how to give effective feedback, exercises on getting to know fellow tutors, and utilising information technology. Feedback was obtained through formal questionnaire. Qualitative results were analysed, including comparison of perceptions of new and returning tutors.

Results:
The feedback obtained from workshop participants was overwhelmingly positive, from both new (n=5) and returning (n=8) tutors. Areas particularly well received included relevance of material and impact on tutor confidence and perception of competence. Participants valued the opportunity to meet their fellow tutors. Tutors also expressed a desire for more coverage of information technology in future training sessions.

Conclusions:
There is a lack of evidence in the literature concerning the optimal method to ‘tutor the tutors’ in clinical skills education. We have developed an interactive and informative workshop which included content based on tutors’ perceived needs in addition to faculty’s assessment of what was required. The program was well-received by new and returning tutors alike.

1Barrat, M.S. and Moyer, V.A., Effect of a Teaching Skills Program on Faculty Skills and Confidence Ambulatory Pediatrics, Volume 4, Issue 1, Pages 117-120.

Issues for exploration/ideas for discussion:
• Clinical Skills Tutor training programs in use at other medical schools
• Issues identified by Clinical Skills tutors as important in providing tutoring to students
• How to actively engage clinicians in training workshops
• How to measure change in tutor ability following such workshops