

Teaching Tips

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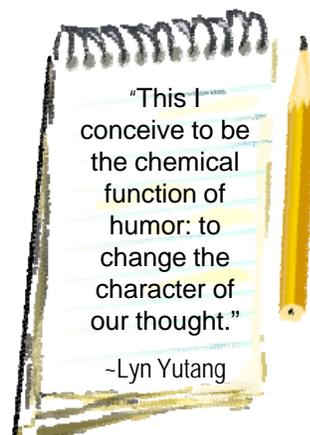


Laughing is Good: Humor in Medical Education

"Look children, this is all I'm going to say about drugs... Stay away from them... There's a time and a place for everything... and it's called college." - Chef Parker & Stone, South Park



Last week, social medicine interns participated in a workshop on motivational interviewing. The presenter introduced important theorists by first sharing this quote. It was only one of many examples of the effective use of humor in medical education he used during the session.



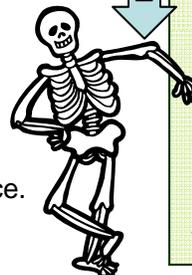
Literature on humor in medical education typically focuses on traditional didactic teaching. But, humor has been studied in other domains including patient-physician communications, psychological components of patient care, and as a coping mechanism for health professionals. Literature may not support claims of improved patient health or student learning, but it does show that humor plays a role in reducing stress, improving morale and productivity, and heightening interest in a topic. The Mayo Clinic even suggests that laughter may improve the immune system and relieve pain. Should we be thinking about how to enjoy these benefits ourselves?

The use of humor may be controversial, but no one has yet studied what physicians think about humor as a tool in medical care and teaching. Anecdotally, discomfort with humor often comes with its inappropriate use. It is also difficult to teach humor, but we can role model appropriate humor and discuss its use with students. For instance:

1. **Hear, interpret and respond to patient's humor. If she says something funny, it is ok – actually beneficial – to respond. Many students don't. Tell them it helps build rapport and a comfortable environment.**
2. **Laugh at and share your own mistakes. If you walked into the wrong room, instead of worrying about the 30 seconds lost, say or think "hmmm, they must have changed the numbers on the door last night."**
3. **Discuss with students why (and when) we use gallows' humor, Freud's theory of using laughter to deal with tragedy and death.**
4. **Address humor and professionalism. Humor should never be at a patient's expense.**

Remember, not everyone has to use humor in their teaching or practice. It is simply one of many tools.

Funny Bone?



References / Resources:

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