Teaching Tips

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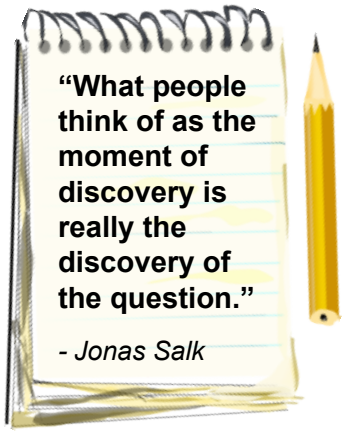
Department of Family & Social Medicine Faculty Development E-Newsletter

Answering Clinical Questions

It is an exceptionally busy day at clinic. The kind of day when you feel that teaching opportunities will be limited because of time demands. With a small amount of planning, however, these hectic days can actually provide a stimulating learning experience for students.



Seeing more patients usually means the student will observe something new and seeing something new can lead to clinical questions. By asking students to develop and research a clinical question each day, you not only foster evidence-based practice (EBP) and self-directed learning, but gain time to see your patients independently.

There are multiple reasons for teaching EBP. For instance, information is so vast and changes so rapidly that what a student learns now is often out-of-date by the time she graduates. EBP develops skills for lifelong learning (one of the new Einstein competencies for medical students), and helps teach students to question "usual practice" especially when USPSTF* guidelines differ from what they see providers actually do in clinic. Most importantly, it helps a student integrate evidence, patient values, experience, and health care environment to individualize care.

Step 1: Formulate a clinical question. The PICO framework helps identify key components of the question (population, intervention, comparison, outcome). The question should be important and answerable. It can be related to findings, diagnosis, management, or prevention to name a few.

Step 2: Locate the best evidence. Start by identifying search terms within PICO, then conduct the search. The type of evidence (from single studies to systematic reviews to decision support systems) determines how much individual appraisal is needed, with single studies needing the most. Refer students to http://guides.is.uwa.edu.au/content.php?pid=46791&sid=344772 for the types of evidence available in many popular online resources.

Step 3: Appraise the evidence. Look for validity, applicability, and clinical importance. Students have learned these skills, but they (or you!) can take a short refresher course online. One option is listed in the box to the right.

Step 4: Apply the evidence. When discussing how to apply findings with your students, some questions include: Are the results clinically important? Do they apply to your specific patient? Do they coincide with the patient's values? Would this clinical setting allow for such practice? And finally, what will the patient need to know to make an informed decision?

References / Resources:

The Education Centre. *Answering Clinical Questions* University of Western Australia.

Online modules available at: http://www.meddent.uwa.edu.au/teaching/acq

* *U.S. Preventive Services Task Force*

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Teaching Tips *is a monthly e-newsletter for Faculty, Residents, and Community Preceptors sponsored by the DFSM Faculty Development Fellowship at Montefiore Medical Center. Teaching Tips will include practical teaching techniques for busy physicians who want to enhance teaching and learning at their clinical practices. If you have any questions, comments, or suggestions for future topics for Teaching Tips please contact Ellen Tattelman at etattelm@montefiore.org or Molly FitzGerald at mofitzge@montefiore.org.*