GPs as teachers and mentors

Contents

Definition

Doctors have long held a tradition of teaching. The Hippocratic oath refers to the importance of teaching and mentoring.[1] Even the origins of the word 'doctor' come from the Old French for 'teacher', based on the Latin *'docere'* (*Oxford English dictionary*).

General practitioners possess many teaching skills that are often not recognised. All GPs educate their patients, and these teaching skills can be transferred to teaching medical students, general practice registrars, peers and health professionals. The skills for teaching can be acquired throughout the professional life, beginning in medical school.

Rationale

Teaching and mentoring are becoming a more common part of the everyday life of a GP:

- universities are directing learning away from the more traditional wards and lecture theatres of metropolitan tertiary hospitals, towards more community based settings, including general practices
- the advent of university departments of rural health and rural clinical schools in the early twenty-first century has seen much medical undergraduate education moved out of metropolitan centres to rural centres
- general practice vocational training has become regionalised, requiring an increasing number of teaching practices and supervisors, trainers and mentors in regional and rural Australia
- the general practice infrastructure of divisions of general practice has mainstreamed local delivery of continuing professional development.

This decentralisation of general practice education has resulted in general practice teaching and mentoring becoming a real career path for any GP as either a supervisor or a medical educator. General practitioners need to develop education skills as an integral part of their professional repertoire.

This curriculum statement aims to define the teaching and mentoring skills that GPs develop at different stages of medical and general practice training. The skills are generic, and are obtainable by all doctors at each stage. The statement also provides a list of extension skills and learning objectives to encourage those interested in furthering a career in teaching and mentoring in general practice.

Medical students as teachers and learners

Equipping students with teaching and learning skills helps students to self direct their learning.

Peer tutoring is an educational strategy whereby student tutors – usually senior medical students – take on the helping role that facilitates first year students in activities by enabling them to support each others learning in undergraduate studies.

Programs concentrating on clinically focused topics, evidence based medicine and physical examination skills in both conventional and problem based contexts have proven to be beneficial for all students, both teachers and learners

Prevocational doctors as teachers and learners

Education in teaching and educational skills is an important and necessary component of the prevocational doctor's overall medical curriculum.

Prevocational residents also demonstrate teaching style preferences that indicate the need for education in this skills area. They prefer a didactic approach rather than developing learner problem solving skills, and rarely use feedback for educational purposes. They prefer to question learners rather than engage in educational discourses, demonstrate techniques and procedures, and reference literature only minimally.[2]

Several key features of teaching and mentoring skills required by graduates at this stage or hospital resident level have been identified. In particular, prevocational doctors:

- spend 20-25% of time teaching
- enjoy teaching and consider it vital for their own education, not only in clinical skills but also in their own self directed learning skills and motivation
- recognise the importance of teaching to the profession
- often have little formal instruction as educators
- would prefer to spend more time teaching than they do
- lack confidence teaching when they need education in areas taught
- demonstrate improvement in teaching skills when they are given formal tuition in teaching

- demonstrate improvement in clinical skills and knowledge, although this cannot be directly attributable to the teaching skills program alone.

Teacher training is therefore recommended for all doctors in their postgraduate hospital years.

Vocational doctors as teachers and learners

Both the teacher and learner benefit from peer assisted learning. Universities are encouraging vertical integration of medical education, and general practice trainees are increasingly likely to experience roles in teaching medical students within the practices where they work. Some vocational trainees also choose to undertake an academic post at a university in which they are expected to teach medical students on campus.

Apart from student teaching, vocational trainees may frequently be involved with teaching peers and other health professionals within the training context. This may occur in workshop settings, small study groups or in clinical practice. Vocational trainees are also a valuable learning resource for their supervisors.

Postvocational doctors as teachers and learners

General practitioners need to develop, maintain and expand skills as trainers, educators, mentors, researchers and leaders over their professional lifetime.

Many GPs will be involved in a variety of teaching roles, eg. staff education or educating medical students (in their practice or in a more formal academic setting), postvocational doctors and colleagues in a peer education process or in 'train the trainer' settings.

Effective teaching demands ongoing review of educational skills, and professional development programs need to consider and review the level of teaching skills required in order to develop and maintain teaching skills to the appropriate standards.

See also: *Philosophy and foundation of general practice.*

The five domains of general practice – GPs as teachers and mentors

Communication skills and the patient-doctor relationship

Teaching and mentoring require a degree of sharing of the teacher's clinical expertise. This requires good communication skills to ensure the messages are heard.

Feedback is an essential part of teaching and mentoring in general practice. Listening to the learner's needs ensures that teaching occurs at the appropriate level and in the appropriate context.

The learner-teacher relationship is the most important factor in the effectiveness of the supervision. Reflection and discussion are important learning tools in general practice. The teacher should demonstrate good interviewing and facilitation skills.

Applied professional knowledge and skills

Effective teaching requires specific knowledge and skills about teaching and learning. Knowledge of clinical skills is not necessarily enough to be an effective teacher. A good clinician is not necessarily a good teacher. Adequate clinical knowledge of the proposed topic is essential for effective teaching and learning, in order to answer the learner's questions. Instructions and practice in teaching skills should be available to clinicians involved in teaching. This could be in the form of short 'train the trainers' courses or postgraduate education. There should be some teaching skills provided at all stages of medical and general practice training. General practitioner teachers should be aware of the range of learning styles, and be able to adjust their teaching style appropriately.

Population health and the context of general practice

Preventive medicine is a key population health strategy for the individual GP, and education skills make a central contribution to the provision of preventive consultation in the clinical setting. General practitioners can play a key role in the community promoting the benefits of population based health strategies, and teaching skills greatly enhance their ability to fulfil this role. The development and use by the general practice teacher of appropriate education resources in the general practice training and education will greatly enhance a learner's educational experience of the population health domain in the RACGP curriculum.

Professional and ethical role

Professional codes of ethics highlight the professional obligation of passing on knowledge and skills to colleagues and students.[3] Teaching should aim to improve patient outcomes and be in no way detrimental to the patient. An effective teacher should recognise their own limits (both in clinical and teaching skills) and knowledge. Effective teaching in general practice requires an enthusiasm for teaching, learning and general practice.

Organisational and legal dimensions

Teaching time should be set aside and protected against other intrusions. The environment in which teaching occurs affects the effectiveness of the teaching and learning. Learners generally respond well to being given increased responsibility with support and clinical advice. However, the supervising clinician maintains overall responsibility for the patient's care. Being available and approachable is a key component to effective supervision in general practice.

Learning objectives across the GP professional life

Medical student

Communication skills and the patient-doctor relationship

- Demonstrate ability to change between the roles of student and teacher
- Demonstrate insight into personal learning gaps
- Demonstrate ability to respond to the personal learning problems, challenges and triumphs of others
- Demonstrate awareness of the influence of personal feelings on the student's learning behaviour
- Describe how to build on own learning strengths
- When involved in teaching, demonstrate how to offer constructive feedback on other students learning progress
- Where appropriate, demonstrate involvement in activities that enable students to support each other's learning in undergraduate studies.

Applied professional knowledge and skills

- Demonstrate how to make learning contracts
- Demonstrate appropriate knowledge and experience of subject areas to be effective in teaching
- Demonstrate provision of reliable information and resources
- Demonstrate effective educational interviewing and facilitation skills
- Integrate a variety of interactive teaching methods to engage students including discussion, interactive lectures using computer based presentations and other audiovisual aids, and small group breakout sessions
- Describe how to self critique each session
- Reflect on the effectiveness of the chosen teaching methods

Population health and the context of general practice

- Identify sociocultural and other population health factors which may inhibit learning
- Describe the relevance of the learning experience to the student and how this could vary according to a student's background

Professional and ethical role

- Develop peer support systems for students
- Encourage peer support and learning through self role-modelling
- Encourage reflection by students
- Describe the importance of learning to recognise one's own limits
- Structure a learning plan to address identified gaps in knowledge or skills
- Encourage students to participate in planning curriculum
- Develop educational activities in collaboration with a supervising mentor academic
- Encourage and support student discussion and clinical questioning on a peer to peer basis

Organisational and legal dimensions

- Demonstrate how to organise time to enable student-teacher access and discussion
- Work in collaboration with academic teachers
- Develop course content consistent with overall curricular goals
- Undertake assessment of the student learning and course material

Learning objectives across the GP professional life

Prevocational doctor

Assumed level of knowledge – medical student

Communication skills and the patient-doctor relationship

- Demonstrate a sound understanding of the application of communication skills in the teaching context, particularly in the areas of:
  - developing and maintaining rapport
  - empathy
  - communicating a nonjudgemental, respectful and supportive attitude
  - appropriate use of nonverbal behaviour
  - articulating context, intent and planning (what's happening, and what will happen next)
  - code switching, ie. addressing different audiences (patient, family members, staff and students)
- Demonstrate a sound understanding of the application of communication skills in the teaching role, particularly in:
  - facilitating learning as well as delivering content
  - supporting student centred learning as well as delivering a normative curriculum
  - mentoring students and offering a learning role model as well as teaching clinical skills
  - developing and offering a safe, supportive learning environment
- Demonstrate an inclusive, team based approach to teaching which involves:
  - orienting students to the learning environment
  - orienting staff and patients to the student's role
  - orienting students, staff and patients to the teacher's role
  - communicating with the student as an integral member of the health care team
  - clearly articulate team roles, responsibilities and expectations

Applied professional knowledge and skills

- Apply adult learning principles in the teaching context
- Assess the learning needs of students, particularly gaps in learner knowledge and skills
- Develop a teaching agenda which focuses what students should learn (eg. normative curriculum) as well as what they want to learn (student centred learning intent), particularly by:
  - assisting learners to 'learn' rather than you 'teaching' what you know
  - drawing on the learner's own knowledge, skills and experience
  - supporting learner autonomy, and learner identification of the appropriate level of autonomy in the circumstance
  - allowing for variation in learning style
- Develop learning objectives which will enable the learner to understand what they need to achieve in terms of learning outcomes
- Facilitate a student's progress through the compilation of a learning portfolio, with particular reference to mentoring:
  - needs assessment
  - learning objectives and plan
  - periodic evaluation and formative feedback
  - systematic collection of evidence of learning
  - periodic revision of the learning plan
  - submission of the final portfolio

- Structure a learning environment to enable learning objectives to be met, particularly by:
  - providing a safe environment for learning
  - managing work rounds to ensure time for teaching and learning
  - applying theory to real scenarios
  - facilitating opportunistic teaching and learning in the experiential setting
- Structure an educational activity to enable learning objectives to be met, particularly by:
  - planning and structuring the learning experience in advance, where possible (ie. specific patients, breakout opportunities, followup group debrief)
  - structuring learner expectations so that learners know what they are expected to know as a result of any one learning unit or opportunity
  - communicating goals/objectives
  - adjusting teaching to the learning environment, and variations in this
  - providing active learning opportunities for the learner by
    - involving the learner in examination of the patient
    - involving the learner in discussion of the patient
    - asking or reflecting questions back to the learner
    - encouraging them to reflect on and assess case and learning arising from it
    - supporting teaching with evidence, standards and guidelines
    - developing a learner's clinical problem solving skills
    - allowing time for practice of skills or procedure and provide feedback
    - providing guidance to appropriate reading materials
    - providing feedback
      - giving positive and constructive feedback individually and in the group setting
  - using audiovisual and electronic teaching aids
  - providing followup learning opportunities, eg. interpretation of tests, referral letters, references, URLs and self directed learning resources
- Demonstrate an understanding of the appropriate use of a variety of teaching methods to enable learners to meet their learning needs and satisfy normative learning objectives, such as
  - lectures
  - small group discussion, particularly to promote active learning and relationship building
  - roleplay
  - bedside teaching
  - teaching in the clinic
  - teaching microskills
    - setting clear learning expectations
    - discussion/questioning, asking questions that promote learning eg. clarifications, Socratic questions, probes, reflective questions
    - motivating learners
    - asking learners to commit to a diagnosis or plan
    - probing for supporting evidence/thought processes
    - directing attention
    - psychomotor skills
    - demonstrating techniques and teaching procedures
    - checking for understanding and retention
    - presentation skills, eg. lecture, small group, delivering information/teaching skills in small chunks
    - giving feedback, particularly on specific knowledge or skills or techniques or evidence
    - inviting questions (now or later)

- Structure an evaluation process that will enable improvement of the educational process, particularly in relation to
  - 360 degree evaluation (student, faculty, self assessment)
  - creating the agenda and opportunity for future learning
  - offering quality assurance
- Implement assessment processes that will enable learning outcomes to be measured
- Deliver content to the limit of their own knowledge and skills

Population health and the context of general practice

- Nil stated

Professional and ethical role

- Model professional behaviour
- Manage interpersonal behaviour in a manner appropriate to the teacher's and educational mentor's role and responsibilities to the learner
- Demonstrate an enthusiastic and motivational attitude to students and to teaching
- Demonstrate accountability for teaching and learning process and outcomes
- Structure an evaluation process that offers quality assurance to peers, faculty and students

Organisational and legal dimensions

- Manage time efficiently and effectively to enable both teaching and educational mentoring and caregiving in the clinical context
- Articulate, as required, the legal constraints and limitations of the teacher/mentor's role in the specific educational context eg. privacy legislation and equal opportunity laws

Learning objectives across the GP professional life

Vocational registrar

Assumed level of knowledge – prevocational doctor

Communication skills and the patient-doctor relationship

- Basic skills
  - clearly explain to learners the reasoning behind the use of particular clinical strategies
  - formulate appropriate questions to encourage learners to develop problem solving skills
  - discuss and demonstrate strategies to help develop rapport with the learner/mentee
- Extension skills
  - demonstrate the ability to provide constructive and specific feedback to learners which challenges them to reflect and expand their skills
  - demonstrate the appropriate use of the range of public presentation audiovisual aids and educational resource technology in delivering education to peers and undergraduates
  - Practice communication skills that are useful in facilitating learning at the one-to-one, small group and larger group contexts

Applied professional knowledge and skills

- Divide tasks or knowledge into manageable portions to improve learning opportunities
- Identify the level at which learning needs to occur for different learners
- Develop personal learning plans and objectives based on identification of learning needs and development of learning activities and strategies to fulfil these objectives

Population health and the context of general practice

- Explain the characteristics of a nurturing environment which encourages learning and professional development
- Identify factors which may be inhibit learning and discuss strategies suitable to address them

Professional and ethical role

- Explain circumstances which would demonstrate appropriate supervision of learners
- Demonstrate appropriate professional role to learners
- Model appropriate attitudes to learning and professionalism
- Identify own limits when teaching others
- Set and maintain appropriate, clear role boundaries
- Discuss strategies that can be used to stimulate learning and encourage reflection.

Organisational and legal dimensions

- Identify and create suitable learning opportunities within consultations
- Explain how to obtain patient consent for the teaching process within the consultation
- Arrange for sufficient time for discussion
- Describe the legislative requirements associated with teaching and learning such as copyright, privacy and public lending rights

Learning objectives across the GP professional life

Continuing professional development

Assumed level of knowledge – vocational registrar

Communication skills and the patient-doctor relationship

- Consider continuing education on communication skills for effective teaching
- Demonstrate ability to provide effective feedback to learners

Applied professional knowledge and skills

- Describe a variety of teaching techniques and their appropriateness to different settings
- Develop further skills in teaching
- Demonstrate ability to assess and deal with students needing further assistance, eg. remediation

Population health and the context of general practice

- Describe differences in individual needs and learning styles between students and registrars and demonstrate ability to adapt to those differences

Professional and ethical role

- Become involved in a network of teachers, professional educator organisations and education providers to encourage further skills development
- Demonstrate awareness of potential conflicts that may occur with an increasing variety of roles, eg. teacher, employer, supervisor, examiner, GP
- Describe the role of being alert to one's own limitations in teaching skills and be able to involve others if needed

Organisational and legal dimensions

- Describe the effects of teaching on the running of a general practice in terms of space, time and finances.
- Recognise the need for ongoing support and resources from organisations involved in training and education

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