LEARNER-CENTRED FEEDBACK

Purposes of feedback
- To "hold a mirror" up to the students
- To engage the student in a dialogue about the effective and less effective aspects of an interaction
- To explore different perceptions and interpretations of the interaction, including those of the patient
- To define the tasks of the consultation and explore strategies for meeting those tasks
- To provide a clinical, practical context for theory
- To provide the input of the experienced practitioner
- To role-model and encourage the process and practice of professional, systematic reflection on the consultation

Models of feedback
This presentation is based on the premise that preceptors and learners are "inquirers, helping one another in the shared pursuit of the truth". This is not to deny that there is an inherent imbalance in knowledge and experience between the preceptor and learner. Rather it recognizes that students are not without any previous knowledge and experience. In addition, preceptors should model, in their interactions with students, the quality of interpersonal communication they expect our students to demonstrate with patients.

Some models of giving feedback suggest giving positive feedback before giving negative feedback. Another approach is to ask the student to comment on their own consultation first, and discuss the issues that they raise, before broadening the feedback discussion to cover issues that they haven't identified. The student is likely to be critical of their performance and comment on the less effective aspects of the interaction first. By following their lead you can "clear the air" of these issues, and the students will be more receptive when you then move on to reinforce the more effective aspects.

The feedback should be challenging, and provide students with insights. One of the major skills for the preceptor is to achieve an appropriate balance between challenging and supporting the learners (see table below). Provide the students with the opportunity to challenge different ways of thinking, to try out their understandings and explore contradictions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Challenge</th>
<th>high</th>
<th>low</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>high</td>
<td>Growth and Motivation</td>
<td>Confirmation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>low</td>
<td>Retreat</td>
<td>Stasis</td>
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Table 1.1 Framework of the tasks of Mentors.

Establish a pattern of constructive feedback, for example - "How could this have been done more effectively?" "What made this effective?" "How could this have been done differently?"

One of the less overt, but prime objectives of providing feedback is that students begin to develop the practice of self-assessment and reflection on performance, and the use of intrinsic feedback in the consultation.
There are a number of principles in providing feedback to achieve these aims:

**Characteristics of Effective Feedback**

Feedback is the communication of information about performance, and has been shown to be effective in motivating and facilitating behaviour change.

Feedback should be **descriptive**, rather than evaluative or judgemental - for example: "I noticed you avoided eye contact with the patient" versus "You are rather weak in interpersonal skills".

Feedback should be **specific**, rather than general. Use direct quotes or examples from the interview to illustrate particular issues. Reflect back what was seen or heard, rather than your interpretation of what was meant.

Feedback should focus on **behaviour**, rather than on assuming personality traits - for example: "The way you noticed Mrs Jones' wincing, and paused to check in with how she was going demonstrated that you were concerned and caring about her experience of the Pap test" versus "You are warm and caring towards your patients".

Feedback involves **sharing information**, rather than on giving advice. Encourage learners to decide for themselves how to handle the problem.

Feedback should be **limited** to the amount of information learners can absorb at the time, rather than overload them. Feedback should therefore be **incomplete**, to encourage students to reflect further on the issues.

Feedback should be **to the point**, so that the messages are clear and unambiguous.

Feedback should be **verified or checked** with learners - for example - "How do you think the interview went?" ....."This is what I observed, does that match how you thought it went?".

The tutor should pay attention to the **consequences** of feedback - the verbal and non-verbal responses of students noted. Students should be encouraged to comment and expand on the feedback.

If the feedback is corrective, the learner must be given the opportunity to explore **alternatives**.

**Avoid collusion**: while brutally frank feedback may be harmful, avoid misleading, meaningless or dishonest feedback - for example: "That was okay", or "You'll improve with further experience".

These characteristics are as true for positive feedback as for feedback which focuses on ineffective interactions.

Based on: Table 11.2 Stewart et al. 1995 p150

**References:**


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