

Title: Improving teaching skills of clinical hospital-based tutors and faculty through a blended training course in teaching (BTCT)

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Context: The School of Medicine of the National University of Comahue, Patagonia, Argentina, is a young institution. The first graduation of 36 students as physicians, emphasizing the education of primary health care practitioners, occurred in 2003. By then, just a few health professionals had been trained to become medical educators, establishing the founding faculty team. Since then, the number of faculty, hospital tutors and students has gradually increased, and currently there are many instructors = faculty/hospital tutors, who are health professionals with no basic teaching training. The most relevant finding, from an appraisal survey to ascertain the grade of motivation for each and identify training needs, held in 2005, showed that 98% of instructors were willing to take courses in teaching, which indicated a need for the intervention.

Objectives: To improve instructors' performance as medical educators through a blended basic training course (face-to-face and distance learning components) through 4 modules: teaching-learning principles, teaching planning, didactic resources and methods of assessment, to contribute to the development of sound clinical skills and competencies in medical students.

Outcomes: New doctors might perform in the future as better health care providers and the number of new physicians getting into medical residences would be increased. As a consequence, health care provision for the community would improve epidemiological indicators, and regarding academic issues, the School of Medicine might increase instructors' support to establish a Department of Medical Education (DME).

Methods: The BTCT was carried out from August 2008 to August 2009 and was taught by two teachers of the Faculty of the Educational Sciences. The assessment of the BTCT was made by modules assignments and a final project, and the BTCT evaluation was made by a survey and data analysis. In addition, to ascertain the effectiveness of the BTCT, comparisons have been made between 2007 and 2008/09 instructors' overall performance and the grade of motivation to teach, as well as students' clinical competencies improvement, utilizing data analysis obtained from surveys and rotations' information.

Results: According to data analysis 72% of instructors who enrolled completed the BTCT. Comparing 2007-2008/09 overall performance, so far, 74% of instructors have improved their teaching methodology and motivational aspects, 88% of students have improved their clinical competencies, and 97% of new physicians who graduated in 2008 have successfully gotten into medical residences, compared to 91% in 2007. Health care statistics and epidemiological data, as well as the support from instructors to establish the DME, will be analyzed by 2010.

Lessons learned: A deficient internet communication system between the course teachers and the participants has caused considerable dropouts, 28 %.

Conclusion: The achievement of the goals of this project will contribute to medical education improvement as those instructors who have never been trained in teaching might perform more effectively and, as a consequence, medical students might perform in the future as better doctors.

Key words: Teaching, learning, training, course, faculty, hospital, tutors, students, clinical, competency, department, health, community, performance, motivation.