

Title: Teaching Advanced Communication Skills to Faculty with Role Play

Author: Paola Sepulveda Andrade

What problem was addressed: Communication skills are one of the competencies that all residents have to achieve. Our program is adopting the CANMEDS model in which communication skills are one of the basic competencies that Medical Schools should teach all undergraduate and graduate trainees. That is the reason why, three years ago, we implemented a course about advanced communication skills (ACS) for 1st-year Internal Medicine (IM) residents.

IM residents were asked via survey about how they were trained and were evaluated regarding ACS. They identified that faculty members were not adequately trained in how to teach and/or assess communication skills. So, we proposed to develop a series of workshops for faculty about how to teach and assess these competencies.

What was done: We sent a survey to all faculty members of our IM Department to ask how they felt about their own communications skills and if they had received formal training on these competencies. Furthermore, we asked them if they wanted formal training and what topics they considered more interesting and/or relevant.

We designed and developed a series of workshops about the three most voted topics. We did a pilot with 6 faculty members. Each workshop lasted 3 hours, with a mini-lecture, reflection and role play. We did an initial evaluation and a final exam using role play with simulated standardized patients. We used a checklist (the same in both exams) and we evaluated the progression in relation to the percentage of achievement. We found 80% of participants improved their performance in a significant percentage.

What was learned:

Strengths and successes:

- We are aligned with the IM program reform to adopt the CANMEDS model.
- We have a small but robust team working in teaching ACS
- We had strong support of our department chair, who also participated in the workshops.
- We used the same dynamic than the residents' course, but it was the first time among peers. Most of the participants had more than five years working as specialists, so their experience strengthened the discussion and our own knowledge about communication.
- We demonstrated that formal training of faculty members is necessary.
- We validated role play and feedback as useful tools to teach communication skills, especially in a small group.
- We got the attention of faculty, and participants evaluated the course as useful and necessary.

Weaknesses and failures:

- We need academic support in order to obtain protected time for our team members. We also need protected time for participants and full recognition of our workshops as formal faculty development.
- We need to expand our team.
- If our final purpose is to offer residents better training in communication skills, we must aim for our workshops to become mandatory for all IM department faculty members.
- Some people still believe that these competencies cannot be taught and it depends on personality traits.