



Today's students: Tomorrow's teachers

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Letters to the editor

Today's students: Tomorrow's teachers

Dear Sir

I read with interest the paper by Nelson et al. (2013) discussing the involvement of senior medical students in teaching their juniors. In the United Kingdom, the General Medical Council states in its guidance "Tomorrow's Doctors" that a medical school graduate should be able to "function effectively as a mentor and teacher including... taking advantage of opportunities to develop these skills" (General Medical Council 2009). To assist newly qualified doctors in making the transition to becoming educators, the value of cultivating teaching skills during the undergraduate years should not be underestimated.

As a final year medical student who is on the verge of starting work as a junior doctor, it has been evident to me that there are various benefits for students who participate in teaching activities. To be a competent teacher, a strong grasp of the subject material is required. Teaching others provides an excellent way of ensuring one's own knowledge base is secure, thus enriching the teacher's own medical education. Student teachers gain experience in structuring tutorials and adapting their teaching methods to the varying needs of others. Early exposure to this will place them in good stead for when they take on teaching responsibilities as clinicians.

Furthermore, junior students who attend student-led teaching sessions reap the advantage of a potentially more relaxed learning environment where they may feel more able to ask questions of their teachers without fear of possible embarrassment in front of senior clinicians. Sometimes student teachers may be better able to deconstruct and communicate complex ideas in ways that are easier for their peers to understand than might be possible by more senior colleagues.

Medical students may serve as an invaluable teaching resource for their peers with minimal financial implications for medical schools. Some medical schools provide training, with subsequent accreditation, to students who opt to develop their teaching abilities. Given the importance of such skills in the medical profession, consideration could be given to formally integrating teaching courses into medical school curricula. Encouraging students to participate in teaching early

in their careers will facilitate the production of effective clinical teachers for future generations of medical students.

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Embellishing personal statements – The hardships of objectivity

Dear Sir

We read with interest the recent publication by Kumwenda et al. (2013) which described the embellishment of personal statements by prospective medical students applying through the University and College Admissions Service (UCAS). In principle, we thoroughly agree that this system is subject to abuse and should be modified to improve objectivity; however, we would add that there are significant hindrances to improving this process which were not mentioned in this original article.

First it is imperative to understand that not all things can be checked or proven. For example, work experience is a necessity for prospective medical students and though we may be able to determine placement length and hours worked, personal experiences, skills and knowledge attained is difficult to assess for any observer and these are crucial components to a candidate's overall success in the application process.

Furthermore, the additional costs to medical schools would create reservations about following-up evidence on UCAS