The Diagnosis and Management of the Learner in Difficulty

CHP Faculty Development Series

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Objectives

- Define and recognize a “learner in difficulty.”
- Practice applying a diagnostic approach to a learner in difficulty.
- Develop management strategies for assisting struggling learners.
“The Learner in Difficulty”

vs.

““The Difficult Learner””
The Learner in Difficulty
The Learner in Difficulty

“A learner with academic performance that is significantly below expected.” (Quirk, 1994)

“Any learner struggling with his or her clinical placement.” (Practicaldoc.com, 2015)

“A student at risk for receiving less than ‘pass’ because of concerns regarding his or her knowledge base, clinical skills, or professionalism.” (Bernstein, et al, 2013)
The Learner in Difficulty

- Challenges in addressing learners in difficulty
  - Lack of comfort, confidence, and/or experience in addressing issue
  - Don’t want to upset people
  - Fear of reprisal
  - No time
  - “Not my problem”
The Learner in Difficulty

Good reasons to address learners in difficulty

- Obligation to learner
  - Learners in difficulty may experience more stress/distress than other learners
  - Easier to correct problems before they are ingrained
- Obligation to profession
  - Learners in Difficulty become Physicians in Difficulty
  - “It is our problem”
- Obligation to patients
Diagnosing the Learner

- Just like ill patients, learners in difficulty often present with symptoms of an underlying diagnosis.
Diagnosing the Learner

- Differential Diagnosis:
  - Knowledge
  - Skills
  - Attitude
  - Learner
  - Teacher
  - System

“K-Salts”

Bernstein, et al, 2013
Diagnosing the Learner

- Differential Diagnosis: Knowledge
  - Deficiencies in the basic and/or clinical sciences
  - Difficulty interpreting information
Diagnosing the Learner

- Differential Diagnosis: Skills
  - Inadequate data acquisition (history and/or exam)
  - Poor organization
  - Faulty clinical reasoning
  - Inability to form trusting relationships with patients
  - Deficient procedure-related technical skill
Differential Diagnosis: Attitude

- Lack of motivation
- Poor insight
Diagnosing the Learner

Differential Diagnosis:
Learner

- Stress/anxiety
- Cultural differences or language barriers
- Sleep deprivation
- Substance abuse
- Learning disability
- Mental illness
Differential Diagnosis:
Teacher
- Stress
- Bias
- Personal dissatisfaction
- Underdeveloped teaching skills
- Lack of motivation
Differential Diagnosis:

System

- Inadequate previous clinical exposure
- Overwhelming workload
- Inconsistency of teaching and/or supervision
- Unaccustomed to technology
Diagnosing the Learner

- Take a history
  - Learner’s goals
  - Academic history
  - Social circumstances
  - Wellness
  - Academic relationships
  - Learning context

- Reach out to others involved in learner’s training
Diagnosing the Learner

- Perform an exam (Observation)
  - H&P
  - Pre-rounding
  - Family Centered Rounds
- Reflect on your own interactions with learner
Diagnosing the Learner: Small Group Exercise:

Part 1:
- What are the top 1-3 most salient problems/deficiencies/difficulties?
- What questions would you ask the learner to gather more information?
- What other steps would you take to gather information?

Part 2:
- What is your differential diagnosis for this learner’s difficulty?
Percentage of residents achieving success following remediation

- Graduation from program: 90%
- Further remediation/did not graduate: 10%

Reamy and Harman, 2006
Management of the Learner

Knowledge:
Management of the Learner

Skills:
Management of the Learner

- Attitude:
Management of the Learner

Learner:
Management of the Learner

Teacher:
Management of the Learner

System:
Management of the Learner

- Always document findings (e.g. Evaluations)
- Reach out to Educational Administration
  - Clerkship Directors (Lynn Cabral and Mike Decker)
  - Chief residents
  - Program Directors (Steph and Andy) and Associate Program Directors (Ana, Rhett, Ben)
  - Fellowship Director
- Know resources
  - Residents and Fellows Assistance Program (RFAP)
  - Student Affairs Office
  - Legal
Learners in Difficulty are common and have a variety of etiologies for their difficulties.

Creating and exploring a differential diagnosis (“K-SALTS”) can help discover opportunities to assist these learners.

Developing and implementing management strategies in collaboration with the learner results in improvement most of the time.
Questions?