

# The Diagnosis and Management of the Learner in Difficulty

## CHP Faculty Development Series

Ben Miller, MD  
Rhett Lieberman, MD  
Mike Fox, MD

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# Objectives

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

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“The Learner in Difficulty”

vs.

“The Difficult Learner”

# The Learner in Difficulty

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# The Learner in Difficulty

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- “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

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- 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

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- ◉ 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

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



# Diagnosing the Learner

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## ○ Differential Diagnosis:

- Knowledge
- Skills
- Attitude
- Learner
- Teacher
- System

***“K-Salts”***

# Diagnosing the Learner

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## ○ Differential Diagnosis: Knowledge

- Deficiencies in the basic and/or clinical sciences
- Difficulty interpreting information

# Diagnosing the Learner

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## ○ 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

# Diagnosing the Learner

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## ○ Differential Diagnosis:

### Attitude

- Lack of motivation
- Poor insight

# Diagnosing the Learner

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## ○ Differential Diagnosis: Learner

- Stress/anxiety
- Cultural differences or language barriers
- Sleep deprivation
- Substance abuse
- Learning disability
- Mental illness

# Diagnosing the Learner

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## ○ Differential Diagnosis: Teacher

- Stress
- Bias
- Personal dissatisfaction
- Underdeveloped teaching skills
- Lack of motivation

# Diagnosing the Learner

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## ○ Differential Diagnosis: System

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

# Diagnosing the Learner

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- 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

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- ◉ Perform an exam (Observation)
  - H&P
  - Pre-rounding
  - Family Centered Rounds
- ◉ Reflect on your own interactions with learner

# Diagnosing the Learner: Small Group Exercise:

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## ○ 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?

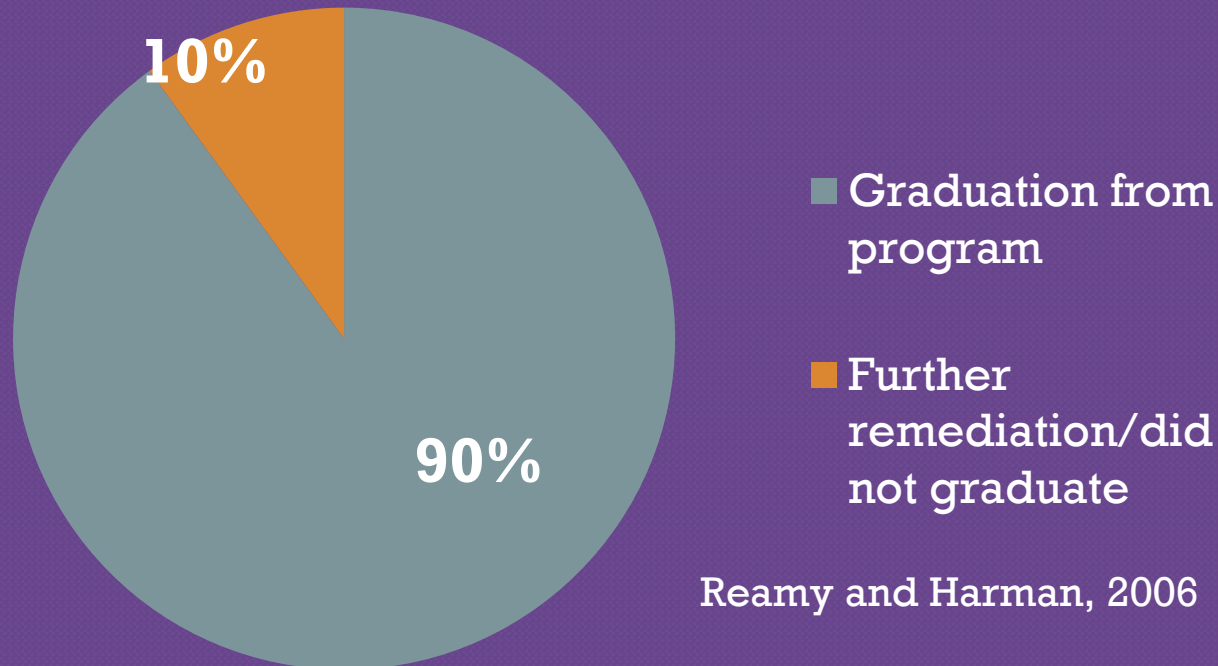
## ○ Part 2:

- What is your differential diagnosis for this learner's difficulty?

# Management of the Learner

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## Percentage of residents achieving success following remediation



Reamy and Harman, 2006

# Management of the Learner

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- Knowledge:

# Management of the Learner

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- Skills:

# Management of the Learner

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- Attitude:

# Management of the Learner

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- Learner:

# Management of the Learner

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- Teacher:



# Management of the Learner

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- System:

# Management of the Learner

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- 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

# Summary

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- 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?