Identifying Characteristics of Effective Small Group Learning Valued by Medical Students and Facilitators

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Abstract
Small group teaching is an important part of undergraduate medical education, providing the ideal setting for learners to clarify misunderstandings, test hypotheses and explore issues. It is an overall process of literature examining case-based small group sessions in medical school. This study was designed to examine perceptions of effectiveness of case-based small group teaching in the pre-clinical years and compare results in order to identify needs and develop teaching interventions to reconnect so that the small group learning experience can be improved.

METHODS: An 18-item survey was distributed to 388 students who started the second year of medical school at the University of Massachusetts between August 2008 and August 2010 and to 146 of 161 facilitators who had facilitated a case-based small group session that same year.

RESULTS: 79 (54%) small group facilitators and 195 (50%) students responded. Of the 195 students who started the survey, 70 answered all questions (88.6%). Of the 195 students who started the survey, 176 answered all questions (90.3%). It is safe to assume that the facilitators who started the survey, 70 answered all questions (88.6%). Of the 195 students who started the survey, 176 answered all questions (90.3%). The nature of a survey is such that questions are subject to varying degrees of interpretation and bias. As such, it is important that respondents interpret the questions in the same manner.

Conclusions
FACILITATOR CHARACTERISTICS
• Students and facilitators agreed that the most desirable role of the facilitator is to be the ‘most desired’ and the ‘least desired’ role.

GROUP ATMOSPHERE AND STRUCTURE
• Both students and facilitators agree that the most desirable role of the facilitator is to be the ‘most desired’ and the ‘least desired’ role.

CASES, CONTENT AND EVALUATION
• Both students and facilitators agree that the most desirable role of the facilitator is to be the ‘most desired’ and the ‘least desired’ role.

FACILITATOR CHARACTERISTICS
Students and facilitators report agreement that problem solving is as important as content coverage (p = 0.05) and that the problem solving process is more important than ‘getting the right answer’ (p = 0.23). The nature of a survey is such that questions are subject to varying degrees of interpretation and bias. As such, it is important that respondents interpret the questions in the same manner.

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