

My experience as a GP Trainer: some reflections

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INTRODUCTION

Some friends of mine who are teachers, possibly in off-hand moments of cynicism, say that “if you do not know what to do, you should become a teacher”. Meaning, I take it, that as a teacher you are to say what should be done rather than have to do it yourself. Of course this is not the holistic picture as teaching is a vocation and there is much, much more to it. And it is so much, much further from the reality of GP Training! Not least of all because a GP Trainer continues to do the “bread and butter” consultations of everyday general practice/family medicine in the clinic while taking on the hat of a GP Trainer.

REWARDS

For me, what comes out most with GP Training is that it is professionally and personally very rewarding. The GP who is a trainer benefits as a GP because s/he keeps abreast of what is going on in the specialty, uses communication skills to bring this knowledge and a variable degree of experience across to the GP trainee, and endeavors to fill in lacunae in skills and/or knowledge. The GP Trainer benefits as a person because one of the essences of teaching is that a teacher gets to know him/herself. But it is not the GP Trainer only who benefits. It is also the whole practice that benefits, be it as a solo GP but possibly even more so within a group practice. This is the result of a regular injection of enthusiasm and input of new ideas and new ways of doing things that GP Trainees bring.

ASSESSMENT PROCESSES

The Specialist Training Program in Family Medicine has been ongoing for a number of years now, and another number of years have gone beforehand onto its making.

The backbone remains the GP Trainee’s formative and summative assessments. The GP Trainer develops and/or acquires through courses the tutorial skills and the steps in the cycle of reflection, the problem-based video consultation / case-based discussion skills and the steps in analyzing them, the assessment of performance and the skills to tackle issues of a GP Trainee in difficulty, and consultation skills teaching. The possibility to involve oneself in small group teaching as when a number of GP Trainees are allocated to a group practice and even more during the teaching sessions of the Half-Day Release Course is an experience on its own, different in many ways to the regular one-to-one teaching.

There is nothing mystic about the assessment process (although I remember myself taking a deep breath in when I first saw the whole lot): there are various useful tools to make sure that both the GP Trainer and the GP Trainee get the most from the assessments. Based on the assessments and feedback, the GP Trainer and the GP Trainee can produce education plans which challenge the GP Trainer and interest and enthuse the GP Trainee, while making sure that the road ahead is in the right direction to successfully sit for the GP Licensing Examination that confers the Certificate of Completion in Specialist Training. The satisfaction is there when the GP Trainee gets the MRCGP(Int). The glee in the eyes of a GP Trainer is there when the GP Trainee graduates in the yearly graduation ceremony organized by the Malta College of Family Doctors and is officially welcomed into the community of general practitioners/family doctors.

CHANGES, PAST AND FUTURE

Despite its infancy, the role of the GP Trainer has seen its changes. The GP Trainer accommodates the changes in the curriculum of GP Training, has had to learn to use the various evolving tools employed in workplace-based assessment, has recently had to come to grips with the e-portfolio and has to abide by a substantial number of deadlines for satisfactory completion of training.

And further change is the catalyst for possible future improvement. I look forward to the coming of training practices, where a group practice provides training for GP Trainees, medical students and foundation doctors according to national standards of training. I look forward to the coming of a support structure so that once a GP Trainer has completed a trainers’ course, the GP Trainer will be followed up in the development of a the skills and competencies as a GP teacher. I look forward to a structure of continued professional development that provides workshops where GP Trainers can share ideas and gain support from others, both new trainers and those with more experience.

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