Effective Small Group Teaching in a Clinical Setting

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Small Group Clinical Teaching

- Teaching goals and objectives
- Types of clinical teaching
- Your role in creating the learning environment and motivating students
- Student evaluation
Goal of Clinical Teaching

Produce competent veterinarians who are critical thinkers and can function independently.
Context of your Teaching

• Understand your students
• Consider your course in the context of the whole curriculum
  – What has been covered previously?
  – Hold the students accountable
• What are your colleagues’ expectations for student performance?
Determining Learning Objectives

• Preparation for entry-level practice
• Dilemma of specialists teaching entry-level skills
• Identify key content in your discipline relevant to entry-level competency
Determining Learning Objectives

• Focus on overarching competencies
  – History-taking
  – Physical examination skills
  – Identifying problems, DDx list
  – Dx work-up, interpretation
  – Formulating treatment plans
  – Communicating with clients, veterinary team
Determining Learning Objectives

• Stimulate critical thinking, decision-making
• *Application* of knowledge rather than acquisition
• Cultivate habit of lifelong learning
• Facilitate the transition to being the doctor
  – Active involvement
  – Opportunities for decision-making
  – Accept responsibility
Define Expectations

• Don’t assume that students know what you expect
• Clearly articulate your expectations
  – Behavior, attire, attitude
  – Preparation
  – Participation
  – Procedural protocols
  – What to do in case of illness, personal problem
Define Expectations

• Communicate the learning objectives to the students
• Help the students set realistic expectations
• Involve the students--ask them what their goals are for the rotation
Choose teaching techniques that will promote the learning objectives

Lecture ≠ critical thinking
Teacher-centered learning

VS

Student-centered learning
Student-centered learning promotes development of:

- Critical thinking
- Independent, lifelong learning
- Communication skills
- Teamwork skills
The clinical year focuses on the application of previously taught and learned material

Student-centered approach
Teaching Opportunities in the Clinic

• Rounds
• One-on-one over cases
• Daily interactions--role modeling
Rounds as a Teaching Tool

• Topic rounds
  – Good way to consistently address specific content in each rotation
  – Can become a teacher-centered lecture

• Case rounds
  – Patient a vehicle for exploring many different aspects of case management – relevant
  – Easier to promote application of knowledge
  – Housekeeping rounds vs teaching rounds
Rounds

• Value-added teaching—more than they can find in a book

• Discuss alternative case management strategies and decision-making
  – Stimulate problem-solving

• Discuss topics not covered in didactic curriculum
  – Financial/business aspects
  – Ethical issues
Learning Environment

The learning environment has a profound effect on student learning.

Learning environments that are positive and supportive promote learning.

Your attitude and behavior have a profound effect on the learning environment and student motivation.
Resident becomes Faculty Member

• You become an authority figure
• Your attitudes and actions will be noticed and will have impact on the students
• You are continually a role model
• You may have to “act” when you are not feeling positive
The Ideal Learning Environment

- Safe
- Low stress
- Encouraging
- Fun
- Allows practice
- Accessible
- Allows mistakes—low risk
- Provides immediate feedback
Create a safe learning environment

• Clearly articulate expectations
• Be consistent
• Be fair
• Avoid the appearance of favoritism
Create a safe learning environment

• Encourage questions—thinking
• Encourage students to take risks
  – Cheerleader—"You can do it!"
  – Protect patients from serious mistakes
• Provide a safety net
Foster teamwork

We are on the same team with the same goal

We want them to succeed
Make learning FUN!

Engage the students!
Show that you care

• Show genuine concern for each student and he/she will put forth greater effort
• Be compassionate
• Respect your students
  – Their time
  – Fatigue
• Invite questions and feedback
Mutual trust is critical in the student-teacher relationship.
Treat your weakest student as you treat your best student

Expect them to succeed
Avoid Bias

• Try not to let pre-conceived perceptions about a particular student’s abilities or performance affect your expectations of that student

• Each rotation should start with a clean slate

• Students pursuing specialty training vs general practice
Challenge your students...
...but show them how to succeed

Students need to believe the goals are attainable
Too little challenge  

Don’t try

Too much challenge

Demotivate
Maintaining standards is critical

- Set high standards
- Clearly articulate your expectations
- Be consistent in enforcing standards
Refrain from giving students the answers

- Give students the opportunity to figure out the answers themselves
- Encourage students to become independent learners

What do YOU want to do?
Questioning can be an effective teaching tool

• Give students the time to answer
• Avoid embarrassing or belittling students
• Know when to stop questioning
Challenges to Clinical Teaching

- Limited control over schedule
- Caseload unpredictable
- Emergencies
- Client demands
- Dependence on others
Challenges to Clinical Teaching

• Multiple groups of students with differing needs
  – Veterinary students (some with different educational backgrounds)
  – Interns
  – Residents

• Concurrent demands on your time
  – Meetings, lectures, labs
Set aside some time every day when teaching is the priority
Student Evaluation
Evaluation methods drive the learning process

Match the evaluation process to the learning objectives
Provide Feedback

• Timely
• Specific, concrete examples
• Provide appropriate positive feedback
• Be honest
• Specific suggestions for improvement
Effective feedback builds students’ confidence

- Improperly delivered feedback can destroy students’ self-confidence
- Too much feedback can be overwhelming
Feedback in a Group Setting

• Treat all students equally
• Do not embarrass students
• Give feedback that will benefit all
• Provide compliments as well as suggestions for improvement
• Feedback should be constructive rather than punitive
• Admit your mistakes
Importance of Feedback

• Feedback drives learning
• Give feedback on non-technical skills as well as technical skills and knowledge
• Students need to know how they are perceived
• Help students learn how to accurately self-assess
Documentation

• Clinical grading is largely subjective
• Document in writing feedback that you provide to students, particularly if student is failing
  – Helpful to student
  – Evidence to defend grade appeal
• Warn students of unsatisfactory performance with sufficient time for them to improve
What are my responsibilities as a teacher?

Be prepared
Be organized
Be accurate
Be a positive role model
Provide feedback
Keys to Motivating Students to Learn

- Enthusiasm
- Show you care
- Encouragement

Be Yourself!
You can have a profound effect on the learning experience
Questions?