“Improve Your Teaching”: Introducing a Free Web Site for Medical and Biomedical Educators

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Dr. Brand New:
You have just celebrated your first year on faculty. You are a committed clinician-educator and are about to increase your teaching duties. You will precept in the residents’ continuity clinic weekly and cover three two-week inpatient teaching blocks. Knowing of your interest, the chair has suggested that you serve as a small group facilitator for a clinical correlates series in the first year medical school curriculum. Faced with your new teaching duties, in addition to your clinical load, you feel that you would benefit from additional training in teaching skills, especially small group facilitation and feedback. But, as a junior faculty member, you just don’t have a lot of free time and your institution does not provide regular faculty development funds to promote teaching skills. Where do you turn?

Dr. Experienced:
You are a senior faculty member with experience lecturing medical students and teaching in the clinical setting. You consistently receive high ratings for clinical teaching and have won several teaching awards. You have been reading about the “flipped classroom,” and know the medical school is using “Team Based Learning.” These are new concepts to you. Where do you turn to get useful and timely information?

Dr. Program or Clerkship Director:
You lead an educational program, and rely on faculty to teach your residents and students in diverse clinical settings which make it challenging to gather for face-to-face faculty development programming. You need a faculty development resource that is accessible to busy faculty, available to them on their own schedule, and which allows you to document their teaching skills training for your accreditation reviews. You’d also consider using such a resource to supplement your Resident as Teacher curriculum.

The Need
Most academic medicine faculty are highly committed to teaching yet few have received formal instruction in teaching skills. Seasoned educators are equally motivated to reflect on their current teaching practices and try new strategies. In addition, academic institutions and training programs are increasingly required to demonstrate faculty development opportunities to enhance teaching skills. The future may someday require that teaching faculty demonstrate a basic level of competence in teaching. However, lack of time on the part of busy faculty may limit their ability to participate in live faculty development offerings. Furthermore, limited capacity and/or a lack of expertise may limit the ability of some institutions to provide effective faculty development programs.

As providers, we have ready access to clinically focused online information, with many Web sites and apps available to assist us in providing high quality care. As educators, we also need easily accessible instruction in teaching strategies that we can access as time permits. For all of these reasons, we have developed an online resource for medical and biomedical educators at the Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine (JHUSOM) and are happy to offer this to anyone interested in improving their teaching skills.

Introducing the “Improve Your Teaching Web Site”
We present these vignettes as a way to introduce a new, interactive, free Web site entitled “Improve Your Teaching” (https://improveteaching.med.jhmi.edu) developed by the Institute for Excellence in Education (IEE) at the JHUSOM. The Web site is an ideal resource for medical and biomedical educators to enhance teaching skills using self-paced modules and provide opportunities to interact with other interested educators and our Web site editorial board, using the comments forum. The site contains sections on “Adult Learning,” “Teaching Methods,” “Assessment,” and “Learners...”
as Teachers.” Within these sections, you will find modules on topics such as Approaches to Learning and Teaching, Formative Feedback, Small Group Sessions, Clinical Coaching, The Flipped Classroom, and Team-based Learning. Additional modules are under development.

**The Making of an Online Web Site to Promote Teaching Skills**

To organize the creation and maintenance of the Web site, a diverse group of educational leaders representing the JHUSOM, IEE, and other medical school faculty development program representatives convened to form an editorial board. The board initially met with the medical school’s technology staff to agree on Web site software (Word Press). We next prioritized subjects and content for the first modules based on previously administered faculty needs assessments. Guided by learning theory, the board agreed on the structure of each module—which included opportunities for reflection and commitment to change on the part of those completing each module. Lastly, as the effort grew, we enlisted the services of instructional designers, both contractually, through a large medical publishing company (Wiley & Sons), and later an instructional design team newly hired by the School of Medicine.

**How to Use This Web Site**

These modules are designed to be self-paced and interactive. Our aim is that both novice and experienced teachers will find the Web site modules useful. The design and content is informed by the science of learning, such that each module is structured to promote reflection, and space and retrieval practice. The modules demonstrate use of teaching strategies such as concept maps, demonstration videos, self-assessments, and reflective practice exercises.

Each module follows a standard structure to enhance experiential learning and includes: (1) learning objectives, (2) preparation in advance for users to reflect on what may be meaningful and useful for them, (3) “the module” didactic content arranged in short segments, so that the user can select areas pertinent to their needs and space their learning as desired, (4) exercises to promote application of the module to real world experiences, (5) next steps, including a framework for peer observation and coaching, and (6) summary points. Modules end with links to additional learning resources for those looking to explore more on the content area.

A “Certificate of Completion” can be obtained after filling out a short evaluation of the module and taking a “quiz” that is intended to assist faculty and programs needing to demonstrate compliance with requirements for teaching skills faculty development.

Each module takes between 30 and 60 minutes to complete, depending on the module and how much of the content interests the user. Consider using these modules to prepare for upcoming teaching responsibilities, such as those described in the vignettes or as a supplement to in-person faculty development offerings at your own institution or at meetings, such as the SGIM national meeting in Washington, DC, this April. If your responsibilities include enhancing the teaching skills of students, residents, or fellows, you may want to take a look at the “Learners as Teachers” section that includes modules on peer clinical coaching, giving a chalk talk, and the One Minute Preceptor model. All of these modules are designed with the trainee teacher in mind.

At Johns Hopkins, we are also using the modules on this Web site to supplement in-person faculty development offerings using a flipped classroom model to engage participants and maximize time for skills practice during live programming.

**Feedback Welcome!**

We invite you to tour the Web site. As we continue to build new modules and revise existing ones, please share your feedback with us! Each page links to a Forum section where you can post comments, ask questions, and make suggestions. Module editors will respond to your posts and keep the learning going. Tell us who you are and how you are using the Web site. Which modules are you finding most useful? What is missing in terms of content from the Web site? Please check us out and let us know what you think. We would love to hear from you. You can also reach us at IEE@jhmi.edu.

**References**