Do you know?

Contributor to this issue: R. M. Harden

Question 1

Non-verbal communication in medical encounters is regarded as an important method of conveying and acknowledging information on emotional status and of contextualising the meaning of verbal communication. It has received, however, little attention in medical education. What is the impact of medical students' non-verbal communication on the evaluation of their competence by patients?

Answer 1

The impact of medical students' non-verbal communication during an objective structured clinical examination was studied by Ishikawa and colleagues (Medical Education, 2006, 40, pp. 1180 – 1187). Eighty-nine medical interviews in an OSCE were analysed. The interviews were video-taped and evaluated on ten non-verbal behaviour items. In addition, the quality of the interview content was rated by medical faculty and the interview was rated by standardised patients. It was found that standardised patients were likely to give higher ratings when students faced them directly, used facilitative nodding when listening to their talk, looked at them equally when talking and listening and spoke at a similar speed and voice volume to them. These effects of non-verbal communication remain significant after controlling for the quality of the interview content as judged by the medical faculty. It is concluded that education in basic non-verbal communication should be incorporated into medical education alongside verbal communication.

Question 2

To be implemented, a curriculum has to be interpreted by teachers. To what extent does this lead to a mismatch between curriculum intentions and teacher goals?

Answer 2

An investigation of the relationship between the learning outcomes expressed in the core medical curriculum at a Swedish university and how these were interpreted by and related to teachers’ teaching goals was reported by Bolander and co-workers from the Karolinska Institute in Quality in Higher Education (2006, 12, pp. 41–55). Semi-structured interviews were conducted with teachers in anatomy and surgery. The teachers were asked what their goals were when they were planning and carrying out the teaching of their subjects. The intention was to see what they interpreted as their role in relation to the core curriculum and to see whether or not they were aware of and influenced by the core curriculum. A content analysis of the core curriculum documents in anatomy and surgery was carried out to see what views of expertise were explicit in the expressed learning outcomes. The authors found that teachers were aware of the core curriculum and were influenced by its content. They found, however, that the teachers’ interpretations of the core curriculum vary according to whether their focus is on the acquisition of knowledge and content and/or competences, or on aspects relating to process and the participation metaphor. The content-orientated core curriculum in both subjects inhibited the possibility of the development of a richer view of expertise by the teacher.

Question 3

Video conferencing has achieved a measure of popularity as a method of simultaneous communication between two or more sites. What are the factors that influence students’ satisfaction with and perceived effectiveness of video conferencing for the purposes of training?

Answer 3

An evaluation of the training activities provided by video conferencing in a university hospital centre with three hospitals attached to the university of Quebec in Montreal was reported by Raffelini (Innovations in Education and Teaching International, 2006, 43, pp. 261–277). Rooms were set up in the hospitals for video conferencing communication. One hundred and forty-eight fourth year medical students were studied over a course of 45 hours, duration. Students experienced taking the course at a local site or at a remote one. A questionnaire was administered to the students at the completion of the course. The authors conclude that video conferencing can be an efficient teaching and learning tool to the extent that the students, and especially the instructor, are successful at integrating it into their training activities. Lecturers play an important role in the process, however. They must adapt themselves, their methods and their teaching materials to the technology. In particular, they must find ways of reducing the social distance that separates the students. They argue that a necessary condition for increasing the efficiency of video conferencing as a teaching tool is to provide its main users, namely the teachers, with adequate training. Students also need to adapt their learning to use and interact with this new learning tool.