

Editorial

TEACHING A LARGE MEDICAL GROUP- LECTURE AS A TOOL

Abstract

There are a variety of people with different mindsets in a large group which are needed to be tackled by the teacher. Students may be keen listeners or not so keen listeners; bored listeners or sleeping students. Does learning of students depend upon the student's abilities? We cannot deny it but we also cannot deny that a good delivered lecture makes a very good impact on all types of students.

Teaching a large group is a pleasure for some and frustration for others. This is all due to differences in the management of the lecture as a tool. This tool if used effectively makes a big difference. Knowledge and communication skills are very important part of delivery of lectures. It is an art which may be god gifted or developed; and a science which we need to understand and to develop competence and skills.

Keywords: Teaching large group; pedagogy; lecture; tool; feedback; use of technology; learning

©2010 JPAFMAT. All rights reserved

Introduction

The purpose of teaching is to facilitate learning.[1] The main role of teacher is to enable and assist the learning of the students. It is important "What the student receives, perceives and assimilates then in what the teacher presents, gives or does." Teaching is a profession and like all professions teaching profession rests upon ethics and involves independent judgment, imagination and skills.[2] Previously trend was how to improve teaching but current trend to improve the teaching - learning process. The students should develop skills and competence which should help them in life.

The purpose of teaching is to help the students not only in acquiring knowledge, retain and use this knowledge; but to understand, analyze, synthesize, evaluate and to achieve skills, adopt habits and develop attitudes in life.[2]

It is a well-known fact that quality of healing rest upon the quality of healer and quality of teaching is influenced by the quality of teacher. Medical teacher is supposed to be a good healer and a good teacher. Knowledge is an important part of the teaching and a teacher must have a sound knowledge of the subject. If teacher does not have the knowledge he must make all out efforts to acquire it. Another important skill required from the teacher is the communication skills. Constant efforts should be made to develop and improve this skill.

There are many ways to teach a large group and delivering lecture is one of them. Quality of teaching will

be determined by the teaching programs. Development of quality teaching programs may be top down approach or bottom up approach [3] but its implementation depends upon the facilities and environment of each institution.

According to Newble and Cannon although the lecture can be as effective as other methods to communicate information , but it cannot be as effective as other methods as far as to stimulate thinking, to inspire interest in a subject, to teach behavioral skills or to change attitudes. [4]

When preparing a lecture and teaching one must know what the purpose of today's teaching is. Purpose of lecture may vary from imparting knowledge about a particular topic, critically evaluate a topic, and demonstrate a procedure. It is very good if we can develop an academic argument by presenting pros and cons of the issue or encourage thinking skills. Once purpose has been decided it is useful to make out what the contents of the lecture will be. It will also clarify what further reading is needed in this case. Many appropriate examples will come to mind and should be noted as these may not come to mind at the time of teaching. Some interesting material related to this may also be incorporated e.g. jokes and cartoons. Determine the key points of the lecture. Always develop ideas for key points, give examples and restate the key points. Giving arguments and counter arguments and finally developing on the right argument and concluding may be useful technique. Proceed from what the students know to what the students do not know and from simple to complex issues. Rehearse for your lectures

if you feel nervous and always anticipate that your session will be very good. Always prepare for your opening remarks and do not leave it to last minute chance that it will be good. During your lectures try different active learning procedures e.g. brainstorming sessions, problem solving activities, reading, one to one discussion or small group discussions or activities, active participation. Intersperse these after 20 minutes of lecture as students' concentration decreases as the lecture progresses. Change manner and style after some time. Change the volume and speed of the delivery of lectures. [4]

Student learning depends upon student characteristics, teacher approach and context characteristics. Students' individuality, previous learning and current understanding of the topic determine the student characteristics while curriculum and ethics of the department organizing the teaching program determines the context characteristics. Both these characteristics i.e. student and context are effected by the approach of the teacher. [3] Students also have different learning approaches depending upon for what they are learning and how they are going to be assessed. This may vary from surface learning to deep learning and sometime they may have approach of strategic learning to just clear a particular examination. Teacher has to keep in mind the learning strategies of the students to give them effective knowledge and skills.

"Lecturing can only be a useful learning method for students where the techniques of teaching large groups are appropriately employed." [4]

Discussion

To effectively use this tool the person handling this tool must have thorough knowledge of the subject he is dealing with and should come prepared for the particular lecture to be delivered. Facilitating environment is an added advantage and all efforts should be made so that listeners sitting in the various parts of the classroom have equal access to what is being delivered to them. Good audiovisual aids are a prerequisite for this. The teacher must be well versed with the technology he is using to deliver the lectures. The teacher must be ready with the alternatives in case the technology fails in a particular environment e.g. teacher is using LCD projector and there is failure of electricity supply and there is no back up of power supply.

Teacher needs learning the art of using technology for preparing his lectures. These may vary from use of blackboard, white board, overhead projector, slide projector, LCD (liquid crystal display) projector and

multimedia. Use of technology will definitely enhance the quality of the lectures for a large group.

Contents of the lecture are very important and all the important aspects of the topic must be covered. It is always better to subdivide the contents. In the lectures there is a race between delivering the knowledge against the time limit of the class. Contents must be determined by the goals of the teaching a particular topic and it must generate an interest in the students for further reading on this topic. As it may not be possible to cover everything which you want to tell the students; it is always better to tell them the resources where they can get further knowledge i.e. books, journals and internet sources and their availability

It is very important that medical students should be able to take decisions particularly under pressure and it is better to give situations where they have to take decision and still remain calm. It is good way to involve students during the lecture. This helps to develop the skill of taking decisions as well as it breaks the monotony of the lectures.

Feedback from the students is very important aspect to improve the effectiveness of the delivery of the lectures. Feedback should never be put on a backburner but effectively used to improve the quality of the delivered lectures. Ideally the process of feedback should be started after three months of starting the teaching to a particular group. This feedback should be recorded and analyzed. All those inferences from this analysis should be implemented which can improve the effectiveness of learning among the students.

It is an art how a teacher makes a lecture interesting. Teacher needs to develop oration skills. Be interactive with the students and avoid a monologue. Teacher should understand the needs of the students and the psyche of the students. Always look into the eyes of the students and have a smiling face and behave confidentially. If still feeling a thorn in throat, attend some course on teaching methods. These courses even help the experienced teachers in reinforcing what they are doing or what they were not doing and which could improve the learning of the students.

The best way to do these is that a teacher should periodically be in place of students. A teacher has to be good learner himself to be a better teacher. He should know the hindrances in a particular environment which reduces the chances of learning and he should avoid these obstacles of learning.

At various times during teaching it must be emphasized that team work is very important in medical profession and the skills which the medical students will

learn are often best utilized while working as a member of the team.

According to Cochrane always assume that a teaching activity is ineffective unless there is evidence to the contrary [5] and this seems to be cornerstone of the activity of teaching.

In medical colleges teachers have to take care of patients or do the laboratory work of the patients, do the research work and write the research papers, and to teach the students. A good medical teacher must have the quality of being available to the students, to provide constructive criticism of the student's learning objectives and working methods, to analyze and evaluate health problems, to define learning objectives, to assess students' work, to prepare learning aids, to select professional activities for students, to confront students with new problems, to develop problem solving skills, to aid the understanding of basic scientific principles, to supervise the student's progress, to identify the factors underlying health problems, to encourage intellectual discipline and moreover to set an example. [2]

Conclusions

Teacher always should give importance to the opening remarks and it is better to practice it then to leave it to chance. He must emphasize that why it is important to study this particular topic and should introduce the topic in nontechnical manner if possible. One should go into details of the topic depending upon level of understanding of students; always telling the ambiguities in the topic and how to overcome this hurdle. Generating questions from the audience is tact and answer the question to the satisfaction of the listener. In this process never make it feel that question was stupid but always praise the question as it gives you a chance to clarify the doubts of the audience in a different manner. Active learning should always be appreciated and active learning is always better as compared to passive learning by the students. Person asking a question in the class is an asset as he helps to clarify the confusion and helps to increase the understanding the in the whole group.

Always summarize the topic at the end by telling the practical importance and mention pitfalls and ways to avoid or overcome these pitfalls. Conclusions should be such that it should always evoke interest in further reading and gaining of knowledge and skills in that topic. Teaching process should not dominate learning process. [2] There can be no better truth than the saying of Miller which says that teaching methods which place the student in an

active situation for learning are more likely to be effective than those which do not. [6] Teacher should be a good resource developer and these resources should be communicated to the students. It must be emphasized that how this topic is important to become a good doctor and what problem can be avoided by studying this topic well.

Management of institutions should encourage and promote practices that are considered good. Quality education must increase the professional and employment skills of the learner. Effective delivery of lectures is a combination of art and science of teaching. A true zeal in the teacher to take his students to higher pedestal of learning will definitely increase the efficacy of using lecture as a tool.

To top this all there must be affection and respect for the learners in the heart of the teachers. Students are just like other people in the society. Students must be considered equal partners in the process of delivery of lectures and megalomaniac attitude of the teachers always hampers the learning amongst students. It has been observed that good relationship between the students and teachers always promotes learning and development of skills amongst the students. Teacher should never resort to discrimination amongst the students as it is greatest impediment to the process of teaching and learning process.

Professor RK Gorea
MD, DNB, PhD

References

1. Mackenzie N et al. Teaching and Learning. Paris: UNESCO; 1970. p. 44-50.
2. Guilbert JJ. Educational handbook for health personnel. 6th Ed. Geneva: World health organization; 1987. p 3.02, 3.39.
3. Hénard F. Learning our lesson: review of quality teaching in higher education. Institutional management in higher education. OECD. p2.
4. Newble D, Cannon R. A handbook for medical teachers. 4th Ed. New York:Kluwer Academic Publishers; 2002. p15-38.
5. Cochrane AL. cited in Guilbert JJ. Educational handbook for health personnel. 6th Ed. Geneva: World health organization; 1987. p 3.19.
6. Miller GE. cited in Guilbert JJ. Educational handbook for health personnel. 6th Ed. Geneva: World health organization; 1987. p 3.23.