The “Problem” Learner

Presented by
Anne Robinson MD CCFP
Assistant Professor, Clinical Sciences, NOSM
Conflict Disclosure Information:

Presenter: Anne Robinson, MD, CCFP

Title of Presentation: The “Problem” Learner

I have no financial or personal relationships to disclose
The problem with “Problem Learner”

Other common terms:
• “learner in difficulty”
• “troublesome learner”
• “disruptive learner”
• “impaired learner”
• “difficult learner”
• “incapacitated learner”
• “burned out learner”
• “learner in trouble”
The problem with “Problem Learner”

- “learner in difficulty”
A Framework

1. From intuition to problem identification

1. From identification to problem definition

1. From definition to intervention
### What is the Problem?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>KNOWLEDGE</th>
<th>ATTITUDES</th>
<th>SKILLS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>e.g. Gaps in knowledge of basic or clinical sciences</td>
<td>e.g. Difficulties with motivation, insight, self-assessment, doctor-patient relations. - Easy to identify - Challenging to address</td>
<td>e.g. Difficulties with interpreting information, interpersonal skills, history-taking, technical skills, clinical judgement, time-management, organization. - Often overlap with gaps in knowledge, or with attitude problems.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Be sure to identify strengths in addition to the problems.**
### Who’s Problem is it?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>TEACHER</strong></th>
<th><strong>LEARNER</strong></th>
<th><strong>SYSTEM</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Perceptions, expectations or feelings;</td>
<td>Need to take a history</td>
<td>- Unclear standards or responsibilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Personal experiences or stresses</td>
<td>- Acute life stresses</td>
<td>- Overwhelming workload</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Colleagues’ perceptions, expectations, or stresses</td>
<td>- Learning disabilities</td>
<td>- Inconsistent teaching or supervision</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Mental illness or substance abuse</td>
<td>- Lack of ongoing feedback or performance appraisal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Learner expectations and assumptions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Is it a Problem that must be fixed?

• What would happen if it was not addressed?
• Are the expectations realistic?
Problem Definition

• What is the problem?
• What is the learner’s perception of the problem?
• What are the learner’s strengths/weaknesses?
• What is the learner’s relevant life history?
• What are the teacher’s (and system’s) strengths & weaknesses?
• How do colleagues perceive the learner?
Intervention

• What problem are you trying to address?
• How will you address it?
• Who will be involved in the intervention?
• What is the time frame for the intervention?
• How will the intervention be evaluated?
• How will the intervention be documented?
• How will due process be assured?
David, 3rd year clinical clerk

- incomplete notes
- falsifying information
- making up demeaning names for patients
- too fast with patient encounters
- does not explore psychosocial elements of patient history
Key Points

• Avoid assumptions and labels
• Early identification and intervention
• Take time to reflect on the issue
• It’s not easy to be a learner
• Involve the learner
• Focus on desired outcomes and learner’s strengths
A Couple More recommended papers:

Bing-You & Trowbridge. Why medical educators may be failing at feedback. JAMA 2009;302(12):1330-1