



<http://fhs.mcmaster.ca/facdev/pbsg-ed.html>

# The Learner in Difficulty

## Introduction to PBSG-ED Series

This special series of modules is dedicated to enhancing the educational skills of busy clinical teachers. The modules provide continuing education in a case-based format that makes judicious use of the most recent and best education evidence available. Starting from real-life examples of teaching and learning situations, the modules have been designed to promote discussion with colleagues around challenging issues/dilemmas that are likely to arise when working with learners. Their purpose is to foster reflection and provide opportunities to refine skills – preparing the way for selected changes that can improve teaching and learning.

The majority of learning encounters proceed smoothly, with significant benefits for both learners and teachers. Learners in difficulty create unique challenges for teachers, in addition to potentially jeopardizing the integrity of the training program through the impact on patient care and on the experience of other learners. Although teachers usually recognize when a problem arises, they may feel unprepared with the next steps of problem identification and development of an educational intervention. As a result, teachers may not address critical events which signal the presence of an underlying problem. Most learners in difficulty will eventually perform well if issues are identified early, an educational plan is designed and delivered, and support systems for both learner and teacher are utilized.

### **This module was developed to assist clinical teachers in:**

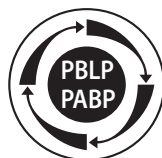
- Making an appropriate assessment of learners in difficulty, including exploration of learner, teacher and system factors.
- Identifying problems early and providing clear documentation for both the learner and training program.
- Developing an educational plan with the learner to facilitate improvement.
- Optimizing communication with the learner and the training program, especially when performance is below expected standards or there is an impact on patient care.

*Developed in collaboration with:*

The Foundation for Medical Practice Education  
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Case Example: Mark, medical student

Part One

Mark, a clinical clerk, is a few months into his clinical placements. He has been working with you for the past two weeks. Your last learner was a very competent resident physician. Although Mark appears capable of handling minor conditions without difficulty, you have noticed that Mark's assessments of more complex problems seem unreliable.

Today, this happened with two patients:

- In the first situation, Mark was unable to make an appropriate assessment and treatment plan for a patient with chest pain.
- The second patient was a woman with menstrual irregularities. You felt that the clinical assessment was very superficial and wonder about Mark's experience with pelvic examinations. In discussion, Mark disclosed that he had little experience with pelvic examinations.

Identify the key issues that may be relevant to your assessment of this situation. (Framework for Assessment, Appendix1 may be helpful).

- How would you address your concerns with Mark at this point?

SAMPLE  
Not for Use