



Tips for Teaching in a Busy Family Practice



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Many community-based FPs incorporate a learner into their busy practice with the recognized value of exposure to these settings for educating students. One of the hopes is that teaching one-on-one will help with future recruitment; some FPs do it just for their own personal enjoyment.

Incorporating a learner into a busy practice works best when:

- staff and patients are informed in advance,
- there is a formal orientation,
- scheduling is modified and
- work space is organized.

Evaluating your environment

Family practice can be a very busy environment. When you choose to get involved in teaching, it is a good time to review the time wasters in your practice, to find some efficiencies, so that when a student is added to the mix, it is manageable for you, your staff and your patients.

Begin by assessing the time wasters in your practice. This could include:

- the amount of time you spend on the phone or on the computer,
- frequent interruptions and
- completing non-physician work that could be delegated.

A good time to evaluate how you organize yourself and your schedule is prior to a learner's

Meet Cathy

Cathy is a community-based FP who runs a busy family practice and enjoys teaching medical students and occasionally residents.

When there is a learner in her practice, it is a challenge for Cathy to keep up and to finish at a reasonable time.

Cathy is interested in learning how to organize herself, her practice and her staff to better accommodate a learner so it remains an enjoyable and valuable experience.

arrival. Other means by which to organize your work environment include:

- the use of a personal digital assistant,
- preparing "to do" lists,
- delegating tasks appropriately,
- arriving early for clinics and starting on time,
- scheduling paperwork and telephone time, as well as
- leaving time for same day appointments.

A good time to evaluate how you organize yourself and your schedule is prior to a learner's arrival.



Table 1

Tasks to delegate to your learner

- Chart audits
- Literature reviews
- Patient education materials
- Community resources
- Laboratory test reviews
- "Rounds"
- Some clinical duties
- Chart reviews
- Forms/letters
- Progress notes
- Journal club presentations
- Family histories
- Referral notes
- Practice assessments
- Writing prescriptions
- Lunch and learn

Before a learner arrives in your practice, you can post a sign for patients indicating that you are taking students. Some university programs provide patient education pamphlets that explain the role of clinical clerks in patient care or what family medicine residents do.

Always make sure your reception staff are on board and know what the student will be doing and that they schedule you to accommodate this extra responsibility. This might mean booking one fewer patient per hour or extending your day while the student is there by up to one hour.

Learner orientation

When a learner starts in the practice, dedicate some time for orientation. The office tour can be delegated to your staff. If you take students regularly, an office orientation manual can be helpful, summarizing all the points you want to

Table 2

Scheduling with a student

Preceptor

- 9:00 patient 1
- 9:15 patient 2 and student
- 9:30 patient 3
- 9:45 patient 4
- 10:00 patient 5 and student

Student

- 9:00 patient 2
- 9:15 patient 2 and preceptor
- 9:30 charts patient 2
- 9:45 patient 5
- 10:00 patient 5 and preceptor

cover with each student. Give the student a dedicated space to work in with some basic resources. Keep each exam room stocked with similar supplies in the same location.

When a learner starts in the practice, dedicate some time for orientation.

Your learner can spend time with other office staff to learn how the practice works, as well as being involved in patient care. Table 1 lists a variety of tasks you can delegate to a learner that can be useful to you and enhance patient care. Students learn best when they are included in the team. Chart audits, medication reviews and literature reviews are just a few examples of roles a learner can play in your practice that can provide a valuable service while they are acquiring new information.

Table 3

Strategies to help you preserve your time while teaching

- When the learner is off service, use time to catch up on patient care
- Share your learner with a colleague, a community agency, or allied health professionals, such as a pharmacist, occupational therapist, physical therapist
- Have them arrange time away from your practice for other family medicine activities:
 - Emergency shift
 - Surgical assists
 - Family medicine maternity care or hospitalist shifts
- Have them tackle a project—get the learner to teach you
- Have them spend time with the receptionist

Learner involvement in patient care

While you consult with one patient, it is possible to have the student meet with another. You can review the learner's patient and while they enter their clinical notes, you can move on to your next patient. Scheduling can help you to run your practice smoothly and teach at the same time (Table 2).

It is valuable not to repeat the whole visit after a patient is seen by a learner. Teach with the patient in the room if both the learner and the patient are comfortable; make sure learners know how much time they are to take with each patient and keep them to a schedule. You can review patients over lunch and do teaching then

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or at the end of the day. You can also teach during travel time if you go to the hospital for rounds, do deliveries or nursing home visits and house calls.

Students value time with other teachers and you can often share your learner with colleagues, community agencies, nurses, a local physiotherapist, or even pharmacist (Table 3).

Conclusions

Many FPs teach for a wide variety of reasons, such as:

- It “keeps them on their toes”
- They can “give back”
- It adds variety to their routine
- It is fun (for many, it is also a professional responsibility)

The demand is certainly there to involve more community family doctors in teaching. There are many strategies to ensure learners have a valuable and effective rotation in your practice and, at the same time, contribute to your patients' care and to your own learning as a physician. This can be done in a busy office with some planning, minor changes in scheduling and maximizing opportunities that learners bring to your practice.

CME

Resources

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