



Are you the weakest link?

By Paul Davis, MB, ChB, FRCP(C), FRCP(UK)

A perennial favourite with television viewers is the game show. This has evolved over the last few years from simple games of chance, dependent on the roll of the dice or the spin of a wheel, to more sophisticated and interactive programming. Many of these new programs have tested the knowledge of contestants on a variety of increasingly sophisticated content and have, in some cases, pitted them against each other. Ratings for such programs are consistently high, and new variants are regularly being introduced (*e.g.*, Weakest Link, Jeopardy, and Who Wants to be a Millionaire?).

Why are these programs so popular with viewers? Apart from seeing contestants get rich quick, and occasionally humiliated by the facilitator, they also provide an opportunity for the viewer to pit

their knowledge and skills against those of the contestants in an anonymous fashion. In addition, the programs provide instant feedback as to the viewer's performance, thus enhancing the individual's learning.

Could these formats play a role in continuing medical education programming?

There is no doubt they do utilize some of the principles of adult learning that we, in continuing medical education (CME), have been trying to promote in the last few years. Assuming the content is relevant to the participants, programs can be adapted to promote knowledge and skill testing, interaction between participants, and provide immediate feedback on performance. These attributes can then be used to assist physicians in their own continuing professional development, by applying the new knowledge gained to their own clinical situation.

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Editorial

At the University of Alberta, we have been working on the development of such programs for both family physicians and specialists, and adapting some of the features of the television game show. Using some of these formats, along with the increasingly popular script-concordance test, we feel they add an extra dimension to CME programming. Apart from the script concordance test—which allows people to reflect on how packages of information may influence future clinical decision-making—adaptations of Jeopardy and Weakest Link have also shown to be generally acceptable to participants.

The particular value of this type of format has been in those programs which last one to two days, and where a variety of formats are used to help maintain participants' interest. We've observed that these programs encourage interaction with individuals or groups of physicians. These participants express a level of competitiveness that often exceeds that seen on the television shows. The pro-

grams are also useful if a content expert is available to provide evidence-based support for the answers (at times, the content expert plays the role of a diplomatic referee). In those programs where we have integrated these formats, the overall ability to provide an enhanced learning experience has met with general agreement in over 80% of the participants. This type of program, however, is not for everyone. Some have expressed the feeling this is no more than a gimmick. Nonetheless, some of the recurrent comments from participants include "lively," "interactive," and "kept me awake."

In summary, our experience has shown that the integration of modified television game shows can enhance the learning experience, if appropriately applied within a general CME event. CME programs should be informative, interactive, and fun. These formats adapted from television game shows provide an opportunity to meet all of these objectives.

CME

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