

A Method for Facilitating Student – Teacher Communication

C.N. Ratnatunga

Department of Microbiology, Faculty of Medicine, University of Peradeniya

A common problem observed in medical students is the reluctance to ask questions from lecturers/ teachers in common forums like lectures and discussions. The objective of the current study was to introduce a method of communication that is both non-threatening and acceptable to the students, requires minimum infrastructure and can record students' feedback.

A magi board was fixed in the department with an attached pen. The students were informed that this board was available for them to write any difficult words and areas that they had encountered during the teaching sessions. Answers were written by the academic staff. Feed back on the method was taken from students after five months. The initial board used proved to be inadequate for the queries written and a larger board had to be introduced within two months indicating that while students took some time to get accustomed to it, they began using it more after a while.

Written anonymous feedback taken from 2nd year students (n=30) showed the following results: 86.7% of students liked the board while 10% neither liked nor disliked it. While only 56% had made use of the board to write a question, 96.7% had learned something from it. A majority (83.3%) of students wanted the board to continue while 16.7% were not sure. However, none of the students wanted the board discontinued. The majority of the students (66.7%) found the board useful while 26.7% found it very useful.

The two most common reasons for not asking directly from a lecturer were feeling shy to ask questions (43.4%) and having no confidence in English (36.7%). The other reasons were that they had no time or that they couldn't find the lecturer. Many students (66.7%) preferred this method of communication to direct contact while 26.6% were not sure. Only 6.7 % preferred direct communication with the lecturer. Ninety percent of students indicated that they would like to have similar boards in other departments as well. While 50% of students felt that the board did not reduce communication with lecturers, 33.4% were uncertain and only 16.6% felt that it did. The suggestions for improvement are using a bigger board, using more diagrams, and explaining the difficult words and concepts at the lecture hall. Some students indicated that they were too shy to even write on the board and therefore suggested a box for students to put questions.

This simple method of communication is a useful tool from the students' perspective. There is room for improvement and further innovation in this area as we need to adjust the tools that we use for communication to the students needs.