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Critical Components of Effective Feedback

Norbert Weiner

"Feedback is the control of a system by reinserting into the system the results of its performance. If these results are merely used as numerical data for criticism of the system and its regulation, we have the simple feedback of the control engineer.

"If, however, the information which proceeds backwards from the performance is able to change the general method and pattern of the performance, we have a process which may very well be called learning."

The Goals of Feedback
- Provide information to students with the intention of narrowing the gap between actual and desired performance
- Encourage learners to think about their performance and how they might improve
- Lead to changes in the learner's thinking, behavior, and performance

The overall goal should always be learner improvement.

Feedback vs. Evaluation
Feedback presents information. Evaluation presents judgment (eg, how well did student do).
Feedback is formative. Evaluation is summative.
Feedback is neutral (verbs and nouns). Evaluation is normative (adverbs and adjectives).

Characteristics of Effective Feedback
- Timely
- Specific
- Constructive
- Measurable
- Verified
- Motivates further learning

Methods of Providing Feedback
FAST – frequent, appropriate, specific, timely

W3 – what went well, what didn't go well, what could you work on

ARCH – ask, reinforce positives, correct negatives, help move forward

360 approach – seek feedback from all team members (nurses, pharmacists, patients, etc.)

Feedback sandwich – positive → negative → positive

One minute preceptor – have the learner commit to a plan, have the learner provide support/evidence for their plan, discuss general rules applied to this plan and future plans, reinforce what was done well, provide constructive feedback on areas in need of improvement, identify learning steps

Dangers of the 'No Feedback' Approach
- Good performance is not reinforced and poor performance remains uncorrected
- Students may assume that all is well
- Students may have to guess their level of competence or rely on comments from peers or administrators to judge performance
- Students may have to learn by trial and error at patients' expense

Feedback should be…
- Undertaken with the teacher and trainee working as allies, with common goals
- Well-timed and expected
- Based on first-hand data (direct observations)
- Limited to behaviors that are remediable (focus on areas that the leaner can control or modify)
- Phrased in descriptive, non-judgmental language
- Deal with decisions and actions, rather than assumed intentions or interpretations

How to Give Feedback
- Ensure that students are clear about the criteria against which their performance will be assessed
- Give feedback on specific behaviors rather than on general performance
- Offer feedback at the time of an event or shortly afterwards
- Limit feedback to one or two items only
- Balance preceptor feedback with student's perception of his/her performance

The Approach to Providing 'Negative' Feedback
- Goal is improvement – ALWAYS
- Relaxed atmosphere (environment)
- Start with letting learner self-evaluate
- Use specific examples, but only 1 or 2 for each session
- Have a script
- Offer positive feedback, too – focus on the work, not the person

- Offer specific ways to improve – may need to change goals
- Ask for feedback from them on how you can improve (make it a team approach)
- Don't form opinions based on what you've heard
- Don't compare to other students
- Don't focus only on the 'negative'

Barriers to Effective Feedback
- Fear of repercussions (for learner and/or preceptor)
- Complexity of human-to-human interactions

Specific Challenges for New Faculty
- Lack of significant age gap/perception of authority
- Casual/friendly relationships
- Lack of preceptor experience/confidence

Providing Feedback to the Millennial Learner (born ~1981-2000)
- Millennial learners expect to be entertained while being educated
- They are used to receiving higher grades
- Raised with constant praise (even if for no other reason than being themselves) – they thrive on positive reinforcement → presents a challenge when a student has lots to improve
- Despite the incorporation of technology into most aspects of their lives, they actually prefer face-to-face or written feedback
- They prefer private feedback
- They seek immediate feedback, both positive and negative
- Millennial learners assume positive if no feedback given

Feedback Pearls
- It all starts with setting expectations
  - Ask the student what are her personal goals
- Be clear when feedback is being given
- Environment is key
- Keep notes throughout the shift/rotation
- Be specific – note specific errors, challenges, and limitations observed AND what are the potential implications of the poor performance
- Embrace the continuous feedback approach (no surprises)

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