

Communication and Counselling Course 2004

A survey of outcome of training

By Dr Tan Yew Seng, Chairman, Mental Health SIG & Council Member, CFPS

Communications and Counselling skills course is a compulsory module of the Graduate Diploma in Family Medicine Programme jointly conducted by the College of Family Physicians Singapore and the Graduate School of Medical Studies of the National University of Singapore. This year's course is a watershed where e-learning was used as a tool to facilitate active learning. The trainees had to successfully complete the theory component via e-learning before they proceed to the practical component of the course. The theory component was structured in the following manner:

The e-learning module included interactive case scenario exercises on management of depression and behavioural modification. There was also an instructional video and a role playing video case scenario. The practical module comprised two 15-minute didactic lectures, a 15-mins video presentation, and followed by two 45-mins role play exercises. 48 trainees attended. They were divided into 4 groups of 12 for the role play exercises.

We conducted a survey to find out the usefulness of the course for the trainees. (see table below).

Most trainees (>90%) agreed that all chosen topics were probably useful to them. However the determination of relevance or usefulness involves 2

concepts: firstly, a topic may be relevant or useful because it is seen frequently in the practice; secondly, it may be relevant or useful because of the topic may concern a very important practice issue, which though uncommon, would have significant consequence to the doctor had he not known about it. It may be for this reason that only 48.4% of trainees believed that breaking bad news about cancer is a frequently or very useful topic to their practice. In terms of the perceived helpfulness of the programme to learn about the topics, the responses were generally positive.

Before the start of the practical course, about one third of the trainees were not confident or only a little confident in applying the following:

- Communicating and counselling depressed patients
- Breaking bad news about cancer
- Stages of change model in behaviour modification
- Approach to Change

The trainees were already "quite confident" or "extremely confident" in topics such as "active listening skills"

(41.9%), and "motivational interviewing for asthmatic patients" (35.4%), before the start of the practical course.

After the course the changes are as

follows: For "communicating and counselling depressed patients" and "approach to change" the results suggested a positive shift in the level of confidence after the course, regardless of their starting confidence level.

For "Use of motivational interviewing for asthmatic patients", the results showed only a minimal increase in the number of trainees achieving mastery (quite confident or extremely confident), but contrary to the trend in all the other topics, there were one more trainee who felt a lack of confidence after the course.

For "breaking bad news about cancer" and the "BATHE technique", the decrease in those who are not confident is modest compared with the increase in those who became very confident.

The situation for "active listening skills" is somewhat reversed – the decrease in



Communication & Counselling course conducted at College lecture room.

those felt less confident is much more that those who felt very confident.

In summary, the course contents were generally well accepted as relevant or useful topics. The success of any teaching programme however, has to be defined by its outcome. Ideally, the outcome of such a programme as the Communication and Counselling Course would be the ability of the trainee to communicate and counsel patients effectively.

In this case, our course appeared to have a positive impact on the confidence of the trainees to apply such communication and counselling skills, despite the limitation in terms of resources, trainers and facilities. Nonetheless, the College will work continuously to improve the quality of the courses and CME programmes to meet the needs and demands of our trainees and members.

USEFULNESS OR RELEVANCE

Q1. From your perspective, how useful/relevant are ideas/skills taught in the C&C course?

Topics	Blank	Not useful	Infrequently useful	Probably useful	Frequently useful	Very useful
1. Communicating & counselling depressed patients	0	0	0	11(35.5)	16(41.6)	4(12.9)
2. Use of motivational interviewing for asthmatic patients	0	0	3(9.7)	9(29.0)	18(58.1)	1(3.2)
3. Use of motivational interviewing for smoking cessation	0	1(3.2)	1(3.2)	9(29.0)	18(58.1)	2(6.5)
4. Breaking bad news about cancer	0	0	2(6.5)	14(45.1)	13(41.9)	2(6.5)
5. Stages of change model in behaviour modification	0	0	0	13(41.9)	17(54.9)	1(3.2)
6. Active listening skills	0	0	0	5(16.1)	21(67.8)	5(16.1)
7. BATHE technique	1(3.2)	0	1(3.2)	5(16.1)	19(61.3)	5(16.1)
8. Approach to Change	0	0	1(3.2)	13(41.9)	14(45.1)	3(9.7)