

## Improving health care professionals' feedback on communication skills: Development of an on-line resource

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### ABSTRACT

**Objective:** This project aimed to develop an open-access on-line resource to assist health care professionals in providing effective feedback on patient-centered clinical and communication skills. The collaborative nature of the development of this learning resource is outlined and evaluation of its use is discussed.

**Methods:** An inter-professional team of teaching staff from two London Universities employed a researcher to interview experienced clinical and academic health care professionals and gather examples of difficult feedback situations. Material was used to develop short video clips illustrating some common challenges in giving feedback on clinical and communication skills. Initial evaluation following use of the scenarios in workshops was undertaken by means of a “talking wall” technique.

**Results:** Evaluation indicated that the resource enhanced the learning experience by providing realistic and challenging scenarios to focus discussion.

**Conclusion:** Inter-professional working and piloting the use of the video scenarios in workshops enabled the improvement and refinement of an on-line staff development resource on feedback.

**Practical implications:** The on-line resource is now available as an open access learning tool, with eight scenarios and guidelines for providing effective feedback in the academic or clinical setting. It can be used for self-study or as part of a group training session.

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### 1. Introduction

Patient centered care is a key quality indicator for all healthcare professions and feedback in relation to it is an important aspect of professional development [1,2].

Communication is one of the key reasons for complaints in the National Health Service (NHS) in the UK [3]. In 2010–11 approximately 20% of complaints related to staff attitude or communication. The Ombudsmen's report reinforces the link between patient outcomes and communication. There is a need for improving communication within health care and a prerequisite for improvement is appropriate high quality training, mentoring and feedback. Even short 4-week training interventions, using experienced clinical supervision have been shown to improve nurses' exploration of patient views and opinions [4].

Effective feedback is crucial to the learning process [5,6] and aids the development of clinical and communication skills aimed at enhancing patient outcomes [7–9]. Sharma et al. [10] suggest that communication skills are often deemed less important than clinical

skills, hence the need to provide appropriate feedback to trainees on their clinical communication skills, to emphasize their relevance to patient care. However providing feedback can be challenging for all involved [11] such that staff need to gain knowledge of the principles of effective practice and rehearse their skills in giving verbal feedback. Training videos can help staff to reflect on challenging communication situations and discuss best practice [12]. An inter-professional team of lecturers in radiography and nursing from City University, London and lecturers in medical education and communication skills from Barts and the London School of Medicine and Dentistry, Queen Mary, University of London identified a lack of authentic materials which could be used to support such staff development activities. A faculty development program resource which used trigger video clips of feedback opportunities and moments had been developed by Lang and colleagues in the USA [13]. However, this excellent material was considered too culturally specific in terms of language and clinical context to transfer to UK teaching settings. Our project therefore set out to produce similar material but with a UK style and suitable for several healthcare professions.

A free open-access on-line resource using short filmed scenarios was produced to enhance feedback skills of health care professionals who teach in both the classroom and practice settings. The resource was designed to be flexible and appropriate

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for staff development workshops and for individual continuing professional development (CPD) study. It could also be used in workshops with students involved in developing their skills in peer assessment and feedback. The clips were intentionally short to trigger discussions and prompt ideas for helpful strategies and techniques.

In this article we discuss the development of the on-line resource and initial evaluation of its perceived contribution to learning.

## 2. Methods

The inter-professional team of academics approached their colleagues from medicine, radiography, ultrasound, and nursing to gather examples of challenges they had faced when providing feedback on clinical and/or communication skills. Examples of narrative accounts were obtained, including teaching situations which required a high level of skill in handling feedback. These collected narratives were de-identified, discussed, synthesized, and elaborated by the project team. The outcome was a series of scenarios or discussion ‘triggers’ based on real life situations that encapsulated feedback challenges, e.g. the self-critical student, the skeptical student, the insensitive student and the distressed student. An example of the latter case included a medical student discussing the case of a young diabetic patient, who was struggling to adapt to the demands of considerable life-style changes. The student’s approach was mechanistic, and lacked empathy as he rigidly worked through a check list of questions (Fig. 6).

The project benefitted from collaborative, inter-professional working at each stage: collecting and adopting narratives, scripting, filming and creating the on-line resource. The shared goal was to produce authentic scenarios which were genuine from the perspective of each profession. This required refinement, revision and rejection of aspects of the script. Attention to detail emerged as important, e.g. uniforms, settings and names, to ensure authenticity. The funding allowed for some expert technical and directing assistance and this ultimately showed in the quality of the product.

Professional actors, academic staff and a nursing student acted roles in the video vignettes. Each scenario was loosely scripted, to provide the basic information required to staff and actors, whilst allowing a more natural approach to be taken during filming. Filming took place over 3 days in the Saad Centre for Radiography Clinical Skills Education at City University London. To some degree, there was an iterative process during filming with the scripts

revised as new understandings about the nature of feedback emerged (Fig. 1).

The finished filmed product comprised of a DVD demonstrating:

- 8 scenarios illustrating interactions with patients, students and health care professionals.
- Clips of facilitators providing feedback to illustrate good and poor practice.

Workshops were held between October and December 2009, to pilot the DVD and assist in developing and amending it prior to completing the on-line training tool. They included sessions for radiography and ultrasound clinical supervisor training, medical communication skills facilitators, medical students and pediatric psychiatry post-graduate students. In addition the resource was used within a postgraduate nursing mentor education module. Groups typically had 10–15 participants. Most were qualified staff, responsible for skills laboratory teaching and student supervision in the workplace. Others were medical students who were learning to give peer feedback as the development of these essential skills in the early years of training will promote the future feedback skills of these professionals.

Formal evaluation was sought in a number of ways. (i) An independent evaluator attended four separate training occasions, which incorporated use of the DVD. She used a “talking wall” method to evaluate the opinions of participants (14). The latter were given post-it-notes and asked to write comments about the use of the videos, which they posted onto labeled flip-chart paper for each of the following categories:

- “I like”
- “I didn’t like”
- “I learned”
- “I would change”

(ii) She also recorded comments made by participants during discussion in the session as to the value, uses of and drawbacks to the DVD.

(iii) A follow-up course evaluation form was sent to the 15 participants on the Department of Radiography mentors’ training day. It incorporated a 4 point Likert scale question on the DVD: “Using the feedback video helped me to get a better understanding of how to give feedback to students”.

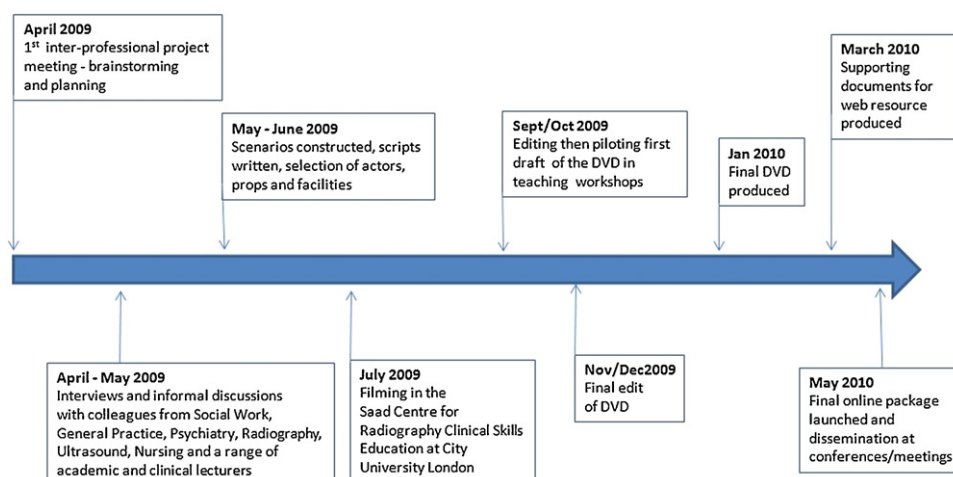


Fig. 1. Timeline for the development of the DVD and on-line resource.

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