

## Strategies for Managing Problem Learners

When handling student problems, it is important to know that you are solving the right problem. This aspect applies equally to student learning problems and managing patient problems. Be sure to thoroughly explore the perceived problem before attempting a solution. When you identify a problem, share your perceptions with the student. Never label the problem, accuse or reprimand the student, or even outline a solution at this point. **Simply share your observations and ask for the student's interpretation.**

Since there is a limited time frame to the clinical practicum, any problems must be identified aggressively before misinterpretations lead to irreconcilable differences. Many perceived problems can be resolved by the preceptor and student simply by clarifying differences in perceptions of expectations.

**For example:** You have a mature and experienced nurse whom you believe is "just not getting it." In your opinion she will "never make it", this influences you when providing an active learning environment for the student. To avert this type of situation, discuss your observations with the student thus facilitating effective communication. If your discussion with the student is not helpful, you should share your perception with the faculty member in an attempt to gain more insight into the student's learning style.

### Steps to Resolution:

1. It is useful to identify the problem within the framework of domains of learning (Bloom's Taxonomy). The learning domains are:
  - Cognitive – knowledge (the recall or recognition of specific facts and concepts that serve developing intellectual abilities and skills)
  - Affective – attitudes (feelings, values, appreciation, enthusiasms, motivations, and attitudes)
  - Psychomotor – skills (physical movement, coordination, and use of the motor-skill areas)

Is this a cognitive, an affective, or a psychomotor problem? Develop strategies that respond best to a specific domain.

2. After your discussion with the student, have the student identify factors that have contributed to the problem and ways to overcome these difficulties.
3. Offer suggestions and available resources for the resolution but the student must be accountable for resolving the problem.
4. Ask the student to submit a written plan, with realistic time frames and steps toward resolving the problem.
5. Share the plan with the faculty member and regularly document progress with both the student and the faculty member.
6. Ask the faculty member if a more formal contract or particular form of documentation needs to be completed.

In addition, reflect upon these questions and discuss them with both the student and the faculty member:

- Can the student overcome the identified deficit within the time limits?
- Is it appropriate to recommend professional counseling?
- What considerations are taken into account when designing the time frame for the learning contract?
- How much allowance should be given to family/personal problems interfering with the learning process?
- Is there a mutual understanding and clear mutual expectations among the various members: the student, the faculty member, and the preceptor?

## How would you handle these specific problems?

### 1. The "knows it all" student

- Validate the student's competencies yourself.
- Point out differences between the student's previous experiences and expectations of the Advanced Practice role.

### 2. The student who blames others for their learning deficits, "I had a really bad teacher."

- Emphasize that *whatever* the reason for gaps in the knowledge base, the student needs to find ways to supplement their knowledge base.
- Focus on resources and approaches available for learning.
- Consult with faculty re: suggestions and other additional resources.

### 3. The student "stressed-out" over personal circumstances.

- Acknowledge that personal problems do take priority at times. But, if a pattern of distraction occurs, learning is jeopardized.
- Do not try to solve the student's problems or take on the problems.
- Keep the focus on the clinical experience and whatever problems are arising due to preoccupation or absences. Ask the student to develop a plan that allows more concentration on the clinical experiences.
- Consult with faculty if necessary. It is possible the student may need a short break from the clinical.

### 4. The student who wants to solve all of the patient's problems RIGHT NOW.

- Direct the student to elicit feedback from the patient, to identify how much information the patient can take in and what the patient will act on.
- Assist the student to map out a realistic plan for following-up on the patient's problems and concerns.

### 5. The student who is concentrating on the skill not the patient.

- Model the behavior you would expect of the student; e.g., inquire into the well-being of the patient. Ask if they need to pause for a minute. Reassure the patient that the procedure is almost over (if true). Tell the patient what to expect during the procedure.
- After the procedure is completed, give the student feedback in private. Remind the student that the procedure will be easier to perform when the patient is relaxed.

### 6. The student who fumbles repeatedly during a physical examination.

- Encourage the student to practice with a fellow student or other willing person.
- Suggest that the student practice a particular skill until it is mastered instead of practicing the entire examination.
- Remind the student that the patients' confidence will be negatively affected unless they develop a more smooth technique.

### 7. The student who cannot interpret the findings of the physical examination.

- Identify the problem by asking the student to "think-out-loud" through the process of interpretation and to focus on the problematic part of the process.
- Role model for the student and think-out-loud through the interpretation process.

- Give some practice interpretations either from patient records or from books, articles, or other resources. Ask the student to obtain practice materials from the faculty.
- Place the process into components that the student can practice.

**References:**

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