COMMENTARY

New Approach to Teaching Histology

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ABSTRACT

At UMDNJ-New Jersey Medical School, we took a new approach in teaching histology to first year medical students. In keeping with the new trend in curricular change, we focused primarily on two objectives: 1) to make histology as clinically relevant as possible and 2) to reduce the lecture time. The core strategy of our approach was to make the laboratory sessions more efficient and effective in both teaching and learning. We implemented two changes to accomplish our goals. First, we equipped histology laboratories with an 'Audiovisual Switching and Projection System'. The technology enabled us to project images from: a) glass slides, b) 2"x2" slides, c) textbook figures and photomicrographs, or d) videotape. Second, we switched from a traditional Lecture-Laboratory-Review sequence to a Laboratory-Lecture-Conference sequence. Each topic starts with a live pre-lab presentation by a topic expert who guides the students in observing the basic histological features to be studied in that laboratory session. Afterward, the students complete the laboratory exercise. Lecture time is used primarily to emphasize the structure-function relationships. The Conference uses structure-function relationships as the basis for a meaningful discussion of clinically relevant topics. With the new approach, we have reduced lecture time from 43 hrs to 34 hrs and moved away from the histological detail previously presented in lecture. We believe that this approach prepares students for subsequent medical training by enabling them to remember the useful and clinically relevant aspects of histology.