

The First Team: Using Anatomy Lab Groups to Teach Teamwork in Medicine

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PURPOSE:

With the emphasis on team-based care in medicine, there is an intensifying need to teach medical students teamwork principles. Gross anatomy lab groups are typically the first “teams” students experience during medical school. We created serial workshops to introduce teamwork principles and develop students’ awareness of their own and their teammates’ personality preferences, and the impact on team functioning.

INNOVATION:

First year medical students in their Human Structure and Function course participated in 3-hour workshops at months 1 and 3. In Workshop 1, students completed personality inventories based on Myers-Briggs personality types, then reviewed their reports. A didactic introduced the strengths and limitations of categorizations and importance of diverse teams. Students with similar results discussed their preferences, including characteristics of people they find more or less challenging to work with, and feelings about constructive feedback. Then students reorganized into their anatomy lab groups, where they discussed their preferences, how these preferences could support or challenge the group, and how to address these challenges, and completed written reflections.

In Workshop 2, a clinician introduced principles of interdisciplinary teamwork and their impact on patients. Students shared their own narratives about dissecting a donor and reflected on how they handled a teamwork challenge and experienced giving and receiving constructive feedback with their lab groups.

Reflections and narrative evaluations were reviewed.

Workshop 1 Activities:

Activity 1: Discussion with students with similar results around the following questions:

1. I love ____ about me.
2. I like working with people who are ____.
3. I am challenged by working with people who are ____.
4. Giving constructive feedback to another person makes me feel ____.
5. Receiving constructive feedback from another person makes me feel ____.

Activity 2: Discussion with anatomy lab groups around the following topics:

1. Answers to the five questions from Activity 1
2. How might your personality help the group function well and create challenges for the group?
3. Identify the group’s collective strengths
4. Project some situations that may prove challenging for the group
5. Discuss specific language and strategies to overcome these challenges should they arise

Workshop 2 Activity:

Activity: Personal reflection on the following topics:

1. Describe one challenge your anatomy group faced
2. How did your understanding of your own personality traits impact how you interpreted and/or responded to this challenge, if at all?
3. How did your understanding of your team members’ personality traits impact how you interpreted and/or responded to this challenge, if at all?
4. Describe one episode where you were in a position to give or receive constructive feedback to a classmate
5. How did your understanding of your personality traits affect how you approached this situation?
6. How do you envision applying what you’ve learned about your own personality traits and those of others to working in teams as you move forward in medical school?

RESULTS:

102 students participated in each session. Reflections described a range of scenarios among lab groups that parallel issues common among clinical teams. Evaluations reflected a spectrum of opinion ranging from highly valuing structured time to address lab group team dynamics and personal experiences dissecting a donor, to concern about the validity of personality inventories.

CONCLUSIONS:

Anatomy lab groups are appropriate for introducing principles of teamwork. Future sessions will emphasize the relative validity of personality inventories for reflection versus research. It will be important to introduce personality inventories as useful tools to stimulate discussion on group dynamics. This may include an introduction to the various industries that make use of personality inventories to stimulate reflection around and enhance group performance.

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