Differential Attainment case study

Intervention to support exam and assessment preparation and providing feedback to trainees

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What is the problem?
A Core Medical Trainee is struggling to progress. He has received feedback through workplace based assessments that his manner towards staff and patients is abrupt and has failed a number of attempts of MRCP(UK) PACES exam. In discussion with his educational supervisor, it is clear that the doctor does not accept that there is a problem with his communication style. The doctor has been successfully working and training in the UK for several years after gaining their medical degree overseas.

What is the solution?
The doctor is at risk of not completing the training programme and so his supervisor asks the Associate Dean to provide some focused coaching around communication skills. Aware that the doctor does not perceive any problem with their communication style, Dr Patel tries a different approach. She suggests to the trainee that they are filmed during a patient consultation so they can watch it back to try and see how others may perceive the behaviours.

What are the challenges?
The trainee reluctantly agreed to take part however shows no insight or willingness to accept that others may view his communication style as abrupt. Without this, it will be difficult for him to engage with the communication skills coaching and to change how others perceive him.

What were the results?
The trainee watches the footage and is genuinely shocked. They are able to see that their approach to the patient is very direct and recognise that whilst this feels natural and appropriate, it is quite different from the way they have seen colleagues communicating with patients, and he can see how his patient reacts to him. Watching the footage is a lightbulb moment and encourages the doctor to think about their approach.
Following filming, there is an improvement in workplace based assessments; Multi-Source Feedback and Multiple Consultant Reports all improve. Within a few months the doctor passes PACES and successfully completes the Core Medical Training programme.

**Want to know more?** Dr Mumtaz Patel can be contacted on Mumtaz.Patel@hee.nhs.uk

If you are interested in using this technique as part of communication skills coaching, Dr Patel has produced this quick tips guide below:

**Checklist**

- Identify the root cause of any communication problems; if the issue relates to communication and/or behaviour, particularly lack of insight, then this technique has proven to be effective.
- Discuss the benefits of watching their own video consultation with the trainee and seek consent.
- Ask permission of the patient with verbal consent (and/or written consent).
- Inform staff in the clinical area (ideally outpatient clinic setting) that the consultation is being filmed.
- Allow extra consultation time so that the filming can be set up and consent gained.
- Immediately after the filming, seek some verbal feedback from the trainee on the interaction before watching the film back and discussing any initial reflections from them.
- Allow some time for the trainee to reflect on the film before arranging to meet them to discuss their thoughts on it. Use the video consultation in a formative way to provide constructive feedback.
- Encourage the trainee to consider setting three learning points from the experience which may be followed up in a further discussion.