

MET and DET- At cross roads...

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Abstract:

Teaching technology, especially in the medical and dental professions, has been a neglected area. The word 'TEACHING' usually conveying, just the fact that whatever syllabus has been put forward by the university has to be completed without giving a thought to make it more effective or interesting and to make it such that the students learn more than what is prescribed for them.

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I have been in the teaching profession since the last 23 years and have seen my own evolution from a nervous postgraduate student taking clinics for the undergraduate students to a confident Professor who can teach sometimes even without any aid. But, this has not been an easy task. In fact it has been a conscious effort to become a good teacher if not an ideal one.

Teaching technology, especially in the medical and dental professions, has been a neglected area. The word 'TEACHING' usually conveying, just the fact that whatever syllabus has been put forward by the university has to be completed without giving a thought to make it more effective or interesting and to make it such that the students learn more than

what is prescribed for them. There are existing reports by think tanks, professional groups and individuals who acknowledged the long standing evidence for a change in teaching methodology (1-2).

It was only when I attended state level conference at NKPSIMS on Research in Medical Education Technology that I got really interested in teaching technology. The problem that we dentists faced whenever we attend any of these conferences/workshops was that it was more for medical teachers with not a single dental faculty or anything related to dentistry, no examples of dental education, no problems discussed about dental teaching. Although so much was being done in Medical Education Technology, the scenario was quite the opposite for dental education.

So the idea was formed to start a separate unit for dental education in our college and we called it Dental Education Unit (DET)--Pride. With this mission, the Vice Chancellor of Maharashtra University of health Sciences (MUHS) inaugurated the unit on 10 July 2012 and offered all his support and resources to ensure the smooth functioning of our unit. Along with this, the other positive factors in favour of our unit were support from management, Dean and MET unit of NKPSIMS&RC, Nagpur who guided us in each and every event.

We were still a little sceptical when we started this unit with a 10 member team, as, sometimes the members themselves were not sure as to what we were supposed to do and also we were aware about similar units having been started but not surviving because of lack of response from the fraternity. In fact, this made us all the more determined to continue with this at all odds. Till date, we have conducted 3 workshops, one on teachers training and two on research methodology. Recently, a Maharashtra state level conference for the dental faculty was organised. Apart from this, various college level programs have been carried out, either to introduce a new teaching technology or exam pattern.

Some of the workshops were a prerequisite for the dentists to become teachers in MUHS and for those we were overbooked, in fact we had to refuse quite a few with all modesty. For the workshops that were not compulsory, we had a tough time convincing people to come and attend. The senior colleagues felt that ‘we have been in the teaching profession since so many years, what new things are you going to tell us’ and the juniors thought that ‘what is there to learn, teaching comes with experience’. Some of them even thought that they were already good teachers. The purpose of these workshops was to make them aware of the various technologies available for effective teaching and not to teach them how to teach. To convince them that this was a win-win situation, as, by incorporating such technologies there would be a definite improvement in our fraternity along with personal growth was a herculean task. Another restraining factor was observed to be time management. As the committee members have to shoulder other academic responsibilities, it was difficult to manage the time for DET activities separately.

The most important task in front of us was to first make everybody aware about the need for a change in not only the teaching methodology but also in the mode of conducting examinations. To answer all these questions a healthy discussion was the need of the hour. Definitely, we received a lot of positive feedback but it looks like a very long road ahead and I am sure with everyone’s support this road will guide us to a successful destination.

The most important things I have learnt during this process are:

- Hard work and persistence pays off no matter what the odds are against you.
- Mistakes provide valuable learning opportunities and the lessons learnt from those mistakes help us to move forward.
- “Vasudheva kutumbakam” i.e. working together cooperatively as one family uplifts the individual and the team as a whole.

- We are all potential change agents, which mean that we have the potential to make positive differences and change teaching technology to become more evolving and innovative.
- The most difficult part in the role of a teacher is to enlighten new concepts of the subject to his own master. But a respectful approach by the juniors and open mindedness of the seniors will help dissolve the barriers of ego.

Conclusively, I would say,

“Teachers are at the heart of future prosperity –an investment in public education is an investment in national defence”.

-Stu Gothold

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