

SELF- DIRECTED LEARNING

Mohammad Hafizullah¹, Wahaj Aman²

This article may be cited as: Hafizullah M, Aman W. Self directed learning. *Ann Allied Health Sci.* 2015;1(1):3-4

“Half of what you will learn in medical school will be shown to be either wrong or out of date within 5 years of graduation; the trouble is that nobody can tell you which half, so the important to learn is how to learn on your own.” David I Sackett¹

Medical science continues to grow at dizzy spells and it is our earnest duty as Allied Health Professionals to our patients, their families and colleagues to continue to learn, imbibe, question and reflect. It is our professional responsibility to become self-directed learners from the beginning and keep on refining it during our professional career. The transition from our graduate schools where the curriculum is well circumscribed to professional life where we have to define our goals and achieve them is like to be thrown in deep sea of wilderness and uncertainty. As a professional one is humbled to recognize that one understands only a miniscule part of what is known with painful realization of half of it being wrong or out of date in a few years. This underlies the importance of adopting self-directed learning. This critical transition has to be smooth and a strategy has to be evolved to make it mandatory and easy for all professionals exiting graduate schools. Young allied health graduates have to be physically and intellectually prepared to adopt the challenge.^{2,3}

Adult learning: Andragogy defined as ‘the art and science of help-

ing adults learn’ forms the basis of learning and adapting in professional life.⁴ It is applicable to all fields in general but health fields in particular. Whereas a lot of work documents its importance in medical field same should apply to allied health sciences. Here we draw on outline of different avenues to self-directed learning and how to approach and adopt them:

Plan your path of learning: Very early in the career one has to take initiative and responsibility for one’s learning. This is professional responsibility of everyone entering the field. There can be nothing father than truth than to assume to ‘know all’ at the end of training. There can no longer be regular class room lectures rather one has to assume the responsibility of what, how and where to learn. One has to recognize one’s professional and educational needs and develop regular habits to promote learning.⁵⁻⁷

Do not stop asking questions and seeking answers: The key to the door of knowledge and research lies in asking questions. One has to learn the art and science of formulating a good question, which starts with a comprehensive literature search. Having developed a question one has to have the requisite enthusiasm, persistence and patience to pursue the answer. The answer demands reflection, discussion, literature search or experimentation. The enthusiasm to ask question should nev-

er be allowed to wither or die down with age and experience.^{7,8}

How to remain current? Every professional has to develop a system of remaining up to date - it is not by choice but an obligation. Everyone has to develop a strategy to keep abreast with latest development in the field. One has to take cognizance of the latest guidelines to offer evidence based services in the clinical practice. One has to browse through the specialty and general journals to be at the cutting edge. How to tap the unlimited resources, considering the constraints of time and resources, remains the challenge and hence opportunity.^{2,9,10}

SMART goals: One has to define goals, specify learning objectives, select resource material and then evaluate the learning process. The art is to set SMART goals implying specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time specific goals in academics and research. Setting goals is the difficult part; the latter shall follow in the due course of time subject to continuous fervor and strong resolution. Setting goals, achieving them and then moving on to newer goals is an integral part of life and it has to be the same for a professional career as well.^{11,12}

Reflect critically: This is something that lacks in our current training model. Critical reflection is essential in learning and practicing all fields of health. One has to develop the habit of continuously questioning oneself. After every challenging or perplexing case one should keep on reflecting and asking, “What could have I done different and how could I have done better?” Reflection opens new doors of wisdom and teaches new lessons - to be applied in the future in similar scenarios.^{2,7,11}

¹ Mohammad Hafizullah, Vice Chancellor, Khyber Medical University, Department of Cardiology, Lady Reading Hospital, Peshawar-Pakistan

² Wahaj Aman, Department of Medicine, Cleveland Clinic, Cleveland, Ohio, USA

Address for correspondence:

Professor Hafizullah

Vice Chancellor, Khyber Medical University, Department of Cardiology, Lady Reading Hospital, Peshawar-Pakistan. Email: mhu5555@gmail.com

Date Received: October 2, 2014

Date Revised: November 20, 2014

Date Accepted: December 10, 2014

Be honest and stay humble: Wearing hat of 'Mr-know-it-all' takes a person nowhere but self-destruction and is the biggest impediment to feed-back and further learning. Develop the attitude of humility and confessing of not knowing, this shall work as a spring board to learn more. Medicine has never been black and white, there are lots of grey shades and try to recognize these shades and acquire the habit of learning more to demystify the ambiguities of your chosen field.^{2,7}

Peer learning: Confronted with a clinical challenge knock at every door. Seek opinion of seniors and try to learn from your colleagues. Every recommendation has to be evidence based and it should be weighed with logic and common sense. Peer learning remains an essential route of developing skills and solving dilemmas - rightly considered as bane of beginners in the career.^{12,13}

Creation: thy name is Divinity: Creation is undoubtedly the most superior form of intellectual pursuit. To create a lecture, paper, concept or idea requires lots of hard work. To capture the concept in words further demands lots of hard work and burning tons of midnight oil. In a professional career one should seek out challenges to create; may it be a talk, a research paper, a novel concept or review of literature. Only those who accept challenges and put in extra hard work shall distinguish themselves in their career.^{14,15}

Broaden your base: Human mind is unique in absorbing knowledge through different avenues and then expressing it in different forms. One has to develop a broader base by including non-medical subjects into one's reading list. This helps to develop a well-rounded personality. This enhances one's understanding of philosophy and one learns to appreciate the nuances of otherwise mundane life.^{2,14,15}

Learn with purpose: Learning has to have sense and meaning. Learning does not entail memorization of some facts. Learning is application of knowledge in practical

life. Learning has to be logical and meaningful.^{2,16}

As one approaches the end of training, one realizes the gaps in knowledge and training. It is humbling to recognize to be privy to a fraction of current knowledge and then to further admit to the fluidity of known facts. It becomes imperative to embark upon the journey of self-directed learning. One has to learn to identify once own goals, select resource material, learn and then imbibe from the well of knowledge, master the art of asking questioning and persist in reflection. The need to become self-directed adult learners has never been more apparent than in current scenario. Every allied health professional is encouraged to recognize the need to become a self-directed learner, independently research the subject and fit it into the practice. By doing so, one shall adopt the very essence of self-directed learning.

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

MH is the Vice Chancellor of Khyber Medical University and Head of Department of Cardiology at Lady Reading Hospital Peshawar, Pakistan

WA is from Department of Medicine, Cleveland Clinic, Cleveland, Ohio, USA

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

Authors declare no conflict of interest.

REFERENCES

- Smith R. Thoughts for new medical students at a new medical school. *BMJ*. 2003;327:1430
- Joshua A. Daily, Benjamin J. Landis. The Journey to Becoming an Adult Learner From Dependent to Self-Directed Learning *J Am CollCardiol*.2014;64(19):2066-2068.
- Goodrich AW, Nutting MA, Wald, L. Report of the committee for the study of nursing education. New Haven, CT: Yale University; 1923.
- Knowles M.S.; What is andragogy?. *The Modern Practice of Adult Education: From Pedagogy to Andragogy*:.40-62.
- Anderson L.W., Krathwohl D.R., Airasian P.W. et al.A Taxonomy for Learning, Teaching, and Assessing: a Revision of Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives, Abridged Edition. White Plains, NY: Longman; 2001.
- Harden RM. International medical education and future direction: A global perspective. *Acad Med*. 2006;81 (12):S22-S9.
- Knowles M.S.; *Andragogy in Action: Applying Modern Principles of Adult Learning*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass; 1984.
- Mazmanian PE, Davis D A. Continuing medical education and the physician as a learner: guide to the evidence. *JAMA*. 2002; 288:1057-1060.
- Premkumar K, Pahwa P, Banerjee A, Baptiste K, Bhatt H, Lim HJ. Does medical training promote or deter self-directed learning? A longitudinal mixed-methods study. *Acad Med*. 2013;88:1754-1764.
- Harvey B.J., Rothman A.I., Frecker R.C.; Effect of an undergraduate medical curriculum on students' self-directed learning. *Acad Med*. 2003;78:1259-1265.
- Duffy FD, Holmboe ES. Self-assessment in lifelong learning and improving performance in practice: physician know thyself. *JAMA*. 2006;296:1137-1139.
- Frenk J, Chen L, Bhutta ZA, Cohen J, Crisp N, Evans T, et al. Health professionals for a new century: transforming education to strengthen health systems in an interdependent world. *Lancet*. 2012; 376: 1923-58.
- O'Connell M. T. and Pascoe, J. M.; Undergraduate medical education for the 21st century: leadership and teamwork. *Family Medicine* 2004; 36:S51-S56.
- Horton, R.; A new epoch for health professionals' education; *The Lancet*; published online November 29, 2010; DoI: 10.1016/S0140-6736(10)62008-9.
- Jafary, N. A.; *Medical Education: A collection of articles*; Ziauddin University Karachi, 3rd edition; 2009; P-16.
- Sousa D A. *How the Brain Learns*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage; 2011