



Be an Effective Trainer in the Appraisal Process

Howard L Young

Trainees want to know how well they are progressing and the appraisal meetings are a way of formalising this process. It provides an opportunity for constructive feedback on a one to one basis between the trainer and the trainee in regular, protected time slots throughout the training period. Crucially, it is a two way dialogue which focuses on personal, professional and educational needs which are identified by both sides and which produce agreed outcomes.

It is the responsibility of the trainer to inform a trainee of poor performance at an early stage and to explain clearly, with specific examples, what aspects of the trainee's behaviour requires improvement.

The First Meeting:

Agree objectives and personal development plan (PDP) with the trainee.

At the first meeting with the trainee, the trainer must discuss the objectives that the trainee wishes to obtain from their attachment. These must be achievable, quantifiable and identify appropriate competencies to be attained during the post. At the final appraisal interview it will be these objectives which will be assessed with the trainee and they will determine how much progress has taken place.

It is the duty of trainers to manage this process fairly, with objectivity, ensuring that regular review takes place at pre-defined times. The use of personal development plans is recommended so that the trainee can work with the trainer to identify what training should take place and how appropriate skills can be developed to achieve the objectives that have been agreed and set.

Subsequent Meetings:

Reviewing the training.

It is recommended that in a six-month post a trainer should meet with the trainee shortly after commencement of their post, at three months and then a final appraisal should take place at six months. If the post is a one year placement then the meetings need to be should be shortly after commencement, at four and eight months, with a final appraisal prior to completion of the post. Provision of feedback to trainees is an essential part of the educational process, and should be incorporated into the day-to-day activities, as well as being an integral part of the process within the appraisal context. A record should be kept of all formal review meetings to enable upgrading of objectives and Personal Development Plans (PDPs).

Problems:

The poorly performing trainee.

It is the responsibility of the trainer to inform a trainee of poor performance at an early stage and to explain clearly, with specific examples, what aspects of the trainee's behaviour requires improvement. An action plan should be drawn up in order to detail what specific actions need to be taken in order to lead to improvements. It is not acceptable for a trainee to discover that their overall performance is assessed as unsatisfactory at the end of their attachment, when this should have been drawn to their attention at an earlier stage in order to allow for remediation.

Interviews:

At the appraisal interview.

Trainers should be expected to make comments upon their perception of the trainee's performance and identify whether the set objectives (even if they have been modified) have been achieved. Provision of clear examples will help to focus the trainee on specific issues.

Appraisal should take place at defined protected times, with the trainee having adequate notice to allow them to prepare. A minimum period of 3 days notice (longer if the trainee requires it) should be considered the norm.

Trainers should provide feedback that is supported with specific examples. Trainees can be easily de-motivated by critical comments, so the feedback must be provided in a careful and constructive manner. This will reinforce the concept of the appraisal process as an educational and developmental event that will prove to be a positive experience, reinforcing strengths and giving appropriate praise. These should always precede the discussion of area in need of improvement.

Trainers should encourage trainees to talk about any problems or difficulties that they may have encountered. There should be a discussion that focuses on how these issues were tackled and how, or if, a solution was found. This can help to identify particular strengths and may flag up areas requiring additional training. Trainees should be encouraged to give their perceptions of the training they have received without fear of reprisal. Just as the trainer should seek to be constructive in their feedback, the trainee should also be encouraged to provide feedback that is constructive in their comments on their training, suggesting realistic ways in which it could be improved.

Trainees should leave an appraisal session with clear and agreed objectives having been set. This may be part of a PDP, which the trainees could present in draft form at the time of the appraisal meeting. Trainer and trainee should have the chance to comment upon the outcome of the meeting and sign off the appraisal form accordingly. Trainees should keep this record along with their PDP.

In summary

- ▶ Appraisal is an integral part of training
- ▶ It should be used constructively by both trainee and trainer
- ▶ Setting objectives early is a key success and enables qualifications of educational goals
- ▶ Trainees must be able to discuss not only their strengths, but also their training development
- ▶ Appraisal requires time and should be undertaken in protected time, set aside and identified in advance to the trainee
- ▶ Appraisal must be constructive, yet highlight deficiencies which can be corrected by use of new or altered objectives
- ▶ Use of Personal Development Plans should be encouraged
- ▶ Appraisal is confidential between trainee and trainer. If circumstance occur where mediation is required this should be the responsibility of the local Postgraduate Organiser
- ▶ Trainers need to ensure that they are trained in undertaking appraisal

Further Information

Spencer Jones, R. (2010). *What makes a good educational supervisor?* Education for Primary Care. 21.4 pp. 230-2010

GMC website: www.gmc-uk.org

Wales Deanery website: www.walesdeanery.org

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