



# Consider the Role of Appraisal and Feedback in GP Education

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There are simple but important reasons for appraising staff and giving them feedback on their performance: trainees should know what they are supposed to do and how well they are doing it. Without appraisal it is difficult for a trainee to identify their own strengths, weaknesses and educational needs. Despite the apparently simple logic behind appraisal, though, it can be difficult to implement effectively and, when done poorly, can be discouraging or demotivating.

Appraisal should be a positive and developmental process for individual clinicians. It sits well within a lifelong learning model of medical care and medical education. All training grade staff deserve regular appraisal and Donaldson (2002) has noted that GP Appraisal is vital in developing a clinical governance culture to ensure high standards and best possible patient care. Good appraisal systems that are well implemented benefit individuals and the institutions where they work. Effective appraisals can, as *Lilley*, (1999) has demonstrated, clarify;

- ▶ The individual trainee's contribution to the organisation
- ▶ The individual's training needs
- ▶ What are acceptable standards of behaviour and care
- ▶ The expectations of the educational supervisor,

## Definition

The Department of Health (2001) has defined appraisal as a process that is confidential, formative and developmental aimed to provide GPs with feedback. It is different from assessment, which is designed to inform decisions about career progress; and different from performance review, which is employment-related and designed to measure achievement against the individual's job plan. The key to successful appraisal is focusing on the educational and developmental goals and needs of the trainee. Appraisal is not a single event, it is not a one-off meeting carried out merely to fulfil regulations and forgotten. Effective appraisal should be a continual process and an integral part of an organisation's culture.

## Effective appraisals therefore should:

- ▶ Be designed to identify educational and developmental needs of individual trainees
- ▶ Be part of (and not a substitute for) day-to-day supervision, support and feedback about performance
- ▶ Include trainers and trainees in devising, implementing and reviewing the system
- ▶ Be recognised as separate from assessments conducted for regulatory purposes
- ▶ Have clear aims that are fully understood by all concerned
- ▶ Consist of transparent processes
- ▶ Be properly resourced
- ▶ Include mechanisms for monitoring participation
- ▶ Include channels for encouraging and collecting feedback about the system and how well (or otherwise) it is working
- ▶ Be well planned and conducted as an integral part of the working environment.

## How should appraisal be conducted?

Undertaking appraisals requires a range of skills and advanced planning. The basic skills needed to carry out effective appraisals relate to feedback and include the ability to listen, support and counsel and ask appropriate questions. In addition to such skills, however, appraisals need to be carried out at appropriate times in places that provide privacy and avoid interruption. Feedback must be constructive not destructive.

Trainees who are being appraised often need help identifying their strengths and weaknesses. Guiding learners how to reflect on their learning is one method to facilitate appraisal, while another method is to follow constructive feedback practices. Both Pendleton (1984) and Silverman, et. al. (1997) have developed processes that facilitate constructive feedback. According to Silverman, constructive feedback should be non-judgemental, specific, directed towards behaviour rather than personality, checked with the recipient, outcome based, problem solving and in the form of suggestions rather than prescriptive comments.

Pendleton's rules for feedback are well known within the GP context and are reiterated here as an aide memoir;

- ▶ Briefly clarify matters of fact
- ▶ Encourage the trainee to say what they have done well and how
- ▶ Supervisor adds comments about what the trainee has done well and how
- ▶ The GP trainee identifies what could be done differently and how
- ▶ The supervisor adds comments about what could be done differently and how
- ▶ Descriptive what was seen/experienced; be descriptive, specific, non-judgemental
- ▶ Probe to discover what else was seen / experienced; what happened next in descriptive terms?
- ▶ Trainee describes what was thought at the time
- ▶ Reflect back to experience
- ▶ Clarify what Goal the trainee would like to achieve
- ▶ Use an outcome-based approach
- ▶ Explore Offers on how to achieve the goal
- ▶ Take suggestions and discuss alternatives.

## Next Steps

Following such processes can help the supervisor to give feedback that the trainee can comfortably take on board. In addition to developing constructive feedback skills, however, attention needs to be given to the time and place of appraisal and appraisal must be regular and private.

The following is a useful format to follow:

1. Arrange a confidential appointment with a trainee in advance & allow time to prepare
2. Both the supervisor and trainee should gather information that helps to identify what the trainee has been doing and indicators of strengths, weaknesses and training needs
3. At the appraisal the trainer should try to put trainee at ease
4. State the purpose of the interview and agree an agenda
5. Review past performance following rules of constructive feedback
6. Identify training needs
7. Agree an action plan
8. Ask trainee for final comments
9. Finish positively, identifying time for next appraisal.

## Myths and Misapprehensions

There are a number of common fears that trainees may have in relation to the appraisal process Chambers et al. (2003). These are often located in the uncertainties that they feel about the process itself. It is clearly helpful therefore to ensure that the process is both transparent and positive. This will enable trainees to fully recognise and appreciate that the benefits of such good practice are clearly of value not only to them but to the wider organisational network and crucially to the quality of the patient care that they deliver.

## Further Information

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