

Giving Short Talks on the Run

Short talks are brief, informal, focused reviews of a current problem, usually given spontaneously to one or a very few learners. A short talk can be used when a need-to-know situation arises.

When a learner has insufficient knowledge to solve clinical problems, the teacher has the choice of:

Asking the student to look up the information for themselves or providing the information in written (or electronic) form or as a short talk.

Short talks are brief, informal, focused, reviews of a current problem, usually given spontaneously to one or a very few learners. They provide essential information "on the run" to help students solve immediate problems and be stimulated to learn more. Short talks are NOT comprehensive formal reviews.

Giving a short talk (5 minutes or less) is very effective teaching, particularly if it is:

- **Well-timed**

Given immediately at the "teachable moment" when the learner needs to know the information and is ready to learn

- **Immediately applicable**

The learner can use the information right away in a very practical application

- **Builds on/expands what the learner already knows**

The information you provide will expand the knowledge and understanding of the learner

- **Is reinforced by future experiences**

Like patient care, teaching by the "short talk" requires a concise, appropriate message at the right time to a prepared listener and good follow-up.

The best short talks are given by experienced busy clinicians - they know "the good stuff" (quote from second-year resident)

When should I consider giving a short talk?

You probably already give many effective short talks every day in providing information to learners during clinical work.

Consider using a short talk whenever a "need to know" arises.

Linking to the Microskills

The acute "need to know" is easy to identify when the student gets stuck in a diagnostic or management problem (Microskills 2 and 3) or makes a poor decision (Microskill 5). Short talks are also appropriate to reinforce and extend learning when the patient/case provides a good example of a common condition (e.g. diabetes) or medical problem (e.g. non-adherence). The learner can use the information both immediately and to apply to other cases or situations (Microskill 6).

How do I give a short talk?

- **Timely** When the need arises if the schedule and the environment allow. Using the "teachable moment" is more powerful than delaying until you feel better prepared.
- **Relevant** Stick to the key issues and "big picture"
- **Concise** Focus on the essential information to solve the current problems
- **Learner-driven** Task the student with filling in details or learning more after clinic or rounds
- **Sustainable** Follow-up at the next session by asking students and commenting on how they integrated the information into patient care.

Pearls for Giving Short Talks

The short talk conveys the information you use every day in managing medical problems. You do know enough to give a short talk - it is not a formal lecture!

Don't be afraid to leave appropriate gaps. The purpose is to stimulate the learner so areas that are controversial or unclear can be assigned for reading.

The most common problem is trying to cover too much material: for example instead of trying to cover hyponatremia, focus on the differential diagnosis or initial management.

Give the learner opportunities to use the information as soon and as frequently as possible. Besides patient care, consider asking the student to give you or your staff a brief presentation on the topic.

Consider preparing for topics that come up frequently for example by having a handout of "key points" or a folder of a few highly relevant articles.