

Teaching Psychiatry - A New Language to the Medical Undergraduate

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Medical students do a Psychiatry rotation during their first clinical year, which is usually their fourth year of a six-year training program. During this rotation they spend up to eight weeks attached to an in-patient service that consists of a multi-disciplinary treating team.

Introducing and teaching Psychiatry for the first time to medical undergraduates is teaching a new language with expectations of the students being able to speak more than just a “dialect” after completion. The possible differences of teaching psychiatry to students than teaching other medical subjects; is the possible bias of students towards psychiatry. Students express a variety of opinions about Psychiatry which ranges from “it is not scientific”, ‘it is too scientific” to “I saw One flew over the Cuckoo’s nest”.

Teaching small groups of students take on different formats. Tutorials are divided into didactic sessions; problem based sessions or a hybrid of the two. Most tutorials have the goal of becoming an interactive learning session.

Educators should have an understanding of the domains that interact during the teaching period, an overview of the group of students rotating at any time, as well as a best possible individual profile of the students in the group. These domains of teaching would include the student’s background, the teacher’s background, the curriculum, the system and setting in which teaching is taking place, society’s unwritten expectations of Psychiatric teaching/practice, and the timing of the teaching. It is important to teach towards giving the student an empathic stance, the ability to grasp concepts and have a syndromal approach.

The individual’s profile can again be as diverse as ranging from the “dismissive sceptic”, to the “dependant rescuer” to the student who might himself/herself have a mental illness.