

Tips for training in Geriatric Medicine

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I have been very busy in the past 2 weeks, both for maintenance of SH services and as examiners for various training programs (DGM, PDip Com Geri (HKU), HKCP Geri Exit Exam and Annual Assessment). There are personal feelings that I would like to share with you, with a will that we can make improvement on certain areas.

Before each examination, I was briefed by the senior examiners that these were geriatrics examination, and we should focus on "geriatrics", but not "medicine for patients who was age > 65". Questions subsequently asked involved geriatrics giants, clinical scenarios (common medical conditions yet with multiple background pathologies that interact and led to the then presentation / or as red-herring) and assessment tools. To me, these are fair and essential questions, as well practical day in day out scenarios for elderly care.

My impression is that some candidates did not know enough on the assessment tools. He / she might just cited that they used certain tools in their own settings. The candidate was then asked about details of the specific tool (e.g. MMSE, TUGT, BMI) which he / she claimed to have been using it at his / her own setting. But then when asked on what the tool is, how is it being done, what is / are the advantages and limitations of the tool, and the interpretation / implication of it in elderly, candidates appeared to have inadequate knowledge on it. Of course, some know more than the other.

Another candidate was asked on pressure sore management. The question was asked because the candidate said that it was one of the commonest skin problems seen in OAH. Yet when asked about the management of it, it seemed that he / she was quite blank.

On my return trip to SH after all these examinations, I ponder by myself and think what would have happened to my own trainees if similar questions were directed to them. At the end, I escaped myself from finding an answer to it. Rather I focus on what we should do (as trainers and trainees):

(I) For trainers:

- (1) Being a Fellow does not mean that we have completed our training. We still have to update ourselves;
- (2) We should try to arrange organised training programs for trainees. This includes not only rotational training or services, but also guiding trainees on reviews of various geriatrics topics;
- (3) From work, I understand that we all encounter pressure on beds. Nevertheless, we should all try our best to focus on geriatrics practice. At least that should be the working practice when we are supervising a Geriatrics HPT (sound schizophrenic!?)

(II) For trainees:

- (1) One should really buy a standard Geriatrics textbook and read through most of the important topics within these 3 years (I know trainees who do not have knowledge on what is / are common / standard Geriatrics textbook, not to mention acquiring one!!!);
- (2) Organise among yourselves study group;
- (3) Do attend the monthly inter-hospital Geriatrics meetings. Colleagues from other settings have done lots of work on its preparation. It serves as good appetizer and helps you to focus on certain aspects of the topic. It also gives you information on your (or even your bosses') blind spots;
- (4) Do not just ask your team member to do whatever assessment tools on the elderly. You should do it by yourself, at least couple of times till you can do that without reading the instruction sheet. Without the practice, you will not be able to know how it is performed, what its structure / components are, and its limitations. You should also read up and understand why this particular tool is so chosen by your unit but not other tools;
- (5) Your supervisor is somebody assigned to guide you. Do talk to your supervisor if you feel confused on the direction. Also, do not hesitate to discuss with him / her on your dissertation starting from idea generation and method.

I am not certain if I am a good supervisor myself. But supervising is a very dynamic process. If I have at certain time of point neglected my HPT, I hope he / she can alert me on it so that I can fulfill my job well. Trainee has an equally important role by taking the initiations.