

THE USE OF TUTORIALS AS A BASIS FOR TEACHING IN A PERIPHERAL TRAINING HOSPITAL

C.A. KAM

SYNOPSIS

A system of tutorials preparing students for the Primary F.F.A.R.A.C.S. examination is described. It is suggested that this system would be suitable for teaching students in a peripheral training hospital.

INTRODUCTION

The trainee in a peripheral training hospital may find difficulties in preparing for post-graduate examinations as formal courses are not available to the trainee. In Malaysia, a considerable number of trainees work in peripheral hospitals under one consultant anaesthetist. In a survey it was found that 81.5% of the trainees in anaesthesia in the peripheral training hospitals in West Malaysia felt that they could not get adequate preparation for examinations (Delilkan, 1976). Whilst formal lectures would be impractical in a peripheral training post due to lack of lecturers, a system of tutorials may be helpful to help the trainee prepare for the examinations. However, the tutorials should not be used as an attempt to guess the content of the examination but rather serve as a guide for study and develop the trainee's skill for the process of the examination.

The communication describes a system of tutorials which were conducted informally to students preparing for the Primary F.F.A. Examination. It is suggested that this system could be used to help trainees in the peripheral training hospitals prepare for the primary as well as final F.F.A.R.A.C.S. Examination.

METHOD

The system of tutorials may be divided into 2 phases:-

- (a) Phase I - Systematic guide to study
- (b) Phase II - Revision tutorials aimed at developing examination techniques.

Department of Anaesthesia,
Faculty of Medicine,
University of Malaya,
Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

C.A. Kam, MBBS, FFARACS, FFARCS.
Lecturer,

Correspondence:

C.A. Kam
Anaesthetics Department,
Blacktown District Hospital,
N.S.W. 2148
Blacktown,
Australia.

Phase I:

This phase starts approximately six to nine months before the anticipated date of the examinations. The objectives of this phase are:-

- (1) Aid the student organise his own scheme of reading. The layout of the tutorial topics should be planned and be systematic. This will enable the student to use it as a guide or programme for reading. Further, it will serve as a general stimulus for study.
- (ii) Enable the students detect his own deficiencies.
- (iii) To stress on the comprehension of basic principles or concepts. It is fairly common to find students able to memorise factual knowledge but unable to apply basic concepts or principles.
- (iv) Enable the student to express himself accurately and concisely.
- (v) As a general guide to the content of the syllabus.

About two tutorials were conducted each week covering topics in 'Physiology, Pharmacology, Statistics and Clinical Measurements. Each tutorial was of approximately 50 minutes duration. The students are expected to read on the topic before attending the tutorial. During the tutorial, the students are questioned on the topic selected in turn to ensure that every student has a chance and no one student dominates the discussion. Discussions between students is encouraged but the tutor must co-ordinate the discussion and prevent it from straying from the point of discussion. The tutorial should help the student organise his thoughts. Occasionally, the students are made to summarise reviews from journals.

Phase II:

This phase starts approximately two months before the examination. The aim during this phase is to develop examination technique. On no account should these tutorials be used as part of an attempt to guess or "spot" the content of the examination. The student's examination technique may be improved by the following:-

- (a) Answering essay questions under examination conditions.
- (b) Mock viva-voce trials.
- (c) Summary answers followed by discussion of the topic (Brown, 1976).
- and (d) Verbal question - answer tutorials.

The deficiencies of the students must be pointed out to them tactfully, for otherwise, the students may be demoralised.

EVALUATION

In the last two years, 7 students attended the system of tutorials described above to help them prepare for the Primary F.F.A.R.A.C.S. examination. Five students were successful at their first attempt at the examination. A questionnaire was used to find out how these students benefited from the tutorials. Whilst no conclusions can be drawn from the questionnaire because of the small number of students, it could indicate the value of the tutorials. The answers are summarised in Tables 1 and 2.

TABLE 1: Problems in preparing for the primary examination before system of tutorials

Problem	Number of Students
1. Difficulty in understanding concepts	7
2. Did not know the scope of study	6
3. No stimulus for study	5
4. Unable to know deficiencies	7

TABLE 2: Benefits obtained from system of tutorials

Benefit	No. of Students
1. General stimulus to study	5
2. Detect deficiencies of knowledge	7
3. Cleared doubts	7
4. Vocalisation improved mode of expression and comprehension	7
5. Organization of facts and thoughts	7
6. Learned to be concise	7
7. Got to know the scope and depth to study	6

All the students felt that they could still benefit from the tutorials even though they had not read up before attending the tutorial.

DISCUSSION

Various methods have been used in teaching and training. At one extreme, all the information is provided by the teacher as in a lecture whilst at the other, the students provide most of the information with the tutor guiding or co-ordinating the discussion. In a peripheral training hospital, there is a shortage of teachers so that the lecture method of teaching is not practical. However, the tutorial

system as described may be feasible and perhaps, more beneficial to the student.

In the lecture system of teaching, there is a one way flow of information from the lecturer to the student. The student is relatively passive and how much benefit is derived depends on a number of factors, namely, the content and presentation of the lecture, the amount of reading on the topic done before attending the lecture and the ability of the lecturer to deliver the lecture and maintain the interest of the students. However, lectures are advantageous in the sense that they can provide for a large number of students and also give the content of the syllabus. The major drawback of the lecture system of teaching is that it does not promote active participation by the students. Usually at the end of a lecture, questions are allowed but this does not provide much discussion. In a peripheral hospital, the lecture system is not practical as there is a shortage of teachers.

The tutorial system, however, is an attractive system of teaching that may be used in a peripheral training hospital. It does not demand too much from the teacher. However, the tutor has to prepare an outline of questions. In this aspect, the Examiners' Report provided by the faculty to the students as well as the supervisors-of-training is extremely useful in helping the tutor. Argument and discussion between students must be encouraged. The tutor must coordinate the discussion and prevent digression. Analysis and criticism of information by the students should be allowed. It is fairly common to find students able to memorise factual knowledge but unable to show understanding basic concepts and application of the basic principles. It is the aim of such tutorials to correct this. Further, no one student should be allowed to dominate a discussion and every student must have an opportunity to speak. By questioning every student in turn, passive participation in the tutorial is prevented. Vocalisation helps the student to find out his deficiencies and also organize his thoughts. It also helps the student to improve his ability to express. The tutor must ensure that each student expresses himself in a concise and accurate manner, without "beating around the bush". In this way, "spoonfeeding" of the students may be avoided. As the students are required to read on the topic before attending the tu-

torial, the system acts as a stimulus for study. However, even though some students have not read the topic before attending the tutorial, they can still benefit by attending the tutorial. The inclusion of essay questions conducted under the examination conditions enable the student to gain practice in organising written answers. The use of summary answers (Brown 1976) has proved to be an extremely useful method to promote logical and comprehensive discussion. The tutor has to be understanding and flexible for otherwise the tutorials can demoralise or discourage the student. A close personal relationship often develops between student and tutor. Frequently, the student may turn to his tutor for psychological support especially when he gets into depressive periods especially near the period of the examination.

However, the drawback of tutorials is that there is a tendency to be examination orientated. To ensure student participation, the size of the group should be limited to ten to fifteen students. This, however, is not a problem in the peripheral hospital as there is usually a very much smaller number of trainees.

It is suggested that the tutorial system can provide an efficient method of preparing trainees in a small peripheral hospital for postgraduate examinations. Often, the trainees in the peripheral centres are sent to formal revision courses conducted by the regional teaching hospitals just before the examination. The tutorials described will enable the student benefit much more from these revision courses. Nevertheless the student must do his share of hard work in order that these tutorials will help him pass his examinations.

REFERENCES

1. Brown, T.C.K: The use of summary answers as a basis for tutorials. *Anaesth. Intens. Care*, 4; 323, 1976.
2. Delilkan, A.E: Report on training in Anaesthesiology in West Malaysia - the trainee's view-point. *Malaysian Journal of Surgery*, 2: 49, 1976.
3. Faculty of Anaesthetists, R.A.C.S: The objectives of training. 1976.
4. Harrison, G.A.: Relationship between examinations and training schemes. *Anesth. Intens. Care*, 1: 281, 1973.
5. Harrison, G.A: The role of formal courses in the vocational training of the anaesthetist. *Anaesth. Intens. Care*, 4: 291 1976.
6. Paul, J.D: Organizing an education exercise. *Anaesth Intens. Care*, 4: 297, 1976.