

“Communication is the most important tool the physician can possess. Learn to respect it and use it wisely”

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Agenda

The appraisal interview is the crux of appraisal. However robust the appraisal process, however well trained the appraiser and prepared the appraisee, unless the appraisal interview itself goes well the value is likely to be limited. This sheet aims to set out some basic principles that should be understood (and remembered) during the appraisal.

Best Practice

Preparation

The appraiser and appraisee should ensure that the paperwork that informs appraisal (Sheets 1,2 and 3) are shared beforehand, with supporting information. Areas important to the appraisee should be understood by the appraiser beforehand so that maximum value can be gained from the appraisal interview itself.

Housekeeping

The appraisal should start on time, it should be clear how long is available and arrangements made to ensure that there are no interruptions. The room should be comfortable and quiet.

Ground Rules

The appraiser should ensure the appraisee understands the confidentiality of the appraisal interview, appreciates what happens to the Form 4s and the (exceptional) circumstances when poor performance issues might necessitate the suspension of the appraisal process. It is also important that the appraisee understands the appraiser is not their in a judgemental role, is not looking to pass or fail the “candidate” nor is a counsellor or their physician.

The Interview

There are many parallels between the successful consultation and a successful consultation interview. The experienced appraiser will work intuitively when all is going well, sensitively drawing out issues important to the appraisee and challenging and encouraging the doctor in their plans. The less experienced appraiser may hold a structure in their mind on which they model the interview, a model that all appraisers may use when the interview appears to founder. Models of consultation such as the Cambridge-Calgary¹ and that described by Neighbour² can be readily adapted to the appraisal. The appraiser may find it useful to find a model that works for them as a mental checklist for the stages of the appraisal interview. For example, Neighbour’s headings as applied to the consultation might trigger the following areas.

Connecting

Putting the appraisee at their ease, gaining an understanding of their practice and their personal professional circumstances. This may be fairly informal but should not rely on pre-conceived ideas.

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“The Appraisal Interview”
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Summarising:

Reflecting back to the appraisee understanding of the issue, succinctly drawing out the main points and checking that they have been correctly understood, thus defining the main relevant points for the appraisee.

Handing Over:

When an issue has been explored and defined, seeking to encourage the appraisee to describe possible next steps and consider how these might happen. If the appraisee is narrow in their focus, the appraiser should be encouraging other possibilities that broaden development opportunities or if the appraisee has a myriad of ideas encouraging them to prioritise and consider practical steps. This requires negotiation and a clear understanding by the appraiser of what resources are available to support the appraisee.

Safety Netting:

Ensuring that important areas have been covered, areas covered have been fully explored and that the appraisee is happy and comfortable with the interview. The way in which paperwork is to be agreed, signed and shared and the development plan written must be made clear and it is wise to again visit the ground rules, ensuring that confidentiality is understood.

Throughout the appraisal the agenda is that of the appraisee, but the appraiser has a responsibility to manage the interview. The product of the appraisal, the development plan, is owned and determined by the appraisee, but supported and informed by the appraiser.

The appraiser will fail the appraisee if they make the agenda their own.

Afterwards

The Form 4 and development plans should be completed and then signed by appraisee and appraiser. The document should accurately summarise the interview and should inform the following year's appraisal (thus is vital bit of paper!)

The appraisee should have the opportunity to discuss the appraisal with the PCO appraisal lead if they have any concerns about the interview.

Checklist

The successful interview relies on

- Careful preparation
- Good understanding of the appraisal process by appraisee and appraiser
- Skilful listening and negotiation skills

References

1. Kurtz, S , Silvermann, J and Draper, J (1998) *Teaching and Learning Communication Skills in Medicine*. Radcliffe Medical Press, Oxford
2. Neighbour, R (1987) *The Inner Consultation*. Kluwer Academic