

Renewing the Curriculum to More Effectively Accommodate Clinical Rotation – An ALTC supported project

Rationale:

This project will integrate Learning Design approaches, problem-based learning and best practice in e-learning delivery methods to address the challenges of maintaining student engagement with scientific basis of medicine learning modules whilst the students are undertaking their clinical rotations (in hospitals) in their 3rd, 4th and 5th year of study in a Bachelor of Medicine degree program. These clinical rotations (also called “Attachments”) comprise a compulsory clerkship practicum which presents unique difficulties in the delivery of relevant information and just-in-time support, given that students are spread across a range of hospitals, many quite a distance from the University.

Traditional medical curriculum approaches to clerkship involve all students returning to campus one or two days a week for lectures – however, this approach is poorly suited to modern hospital rotation practices (in which different student groups attend different hospital specialties, e.g. oncology or paediatrics) and most importantly, all students attend the same lecture on the designated weekly topic, rather than individually focusing their study on topic areas relevant to their particular hospital experiences. This project seeks to renew the curriculum and teaching methods of the crucial latter years of medical training through a flexibly delivered, student-centred approach based on innovative technologies.

The pilot will concentrate on one university’s implementation of the proposed new approach (University of Western Sydney School of Medicine) supported by Learning Design and e-learning professionals from Macquarie University E-Learning Centre of Excellence (MELCOE). In addition to the two Core Partners (UWS & Macquarie – MELCOE), learning designs will be developed in close consultation with a team of medical experts from a number of Advisory Partners (Macquarie University – Australian School of Advanced Medicine; Melbourne University – Biomedical Multimedia Unit; the University of Sydney - Centre for Innovation in Professional Health Education and Research; and La Trobe University - Faculty of Health Sciences to ensure the products of this development can be readily adopted by other medical Faculties at other universities. An international observer with expertise in learning design and medicine (from the Northern Ontario – School of Medicine) will also provide feedback to the project

Additionally, once the designs have been fully developed, the exemplar learning design Modules can be stripped of their content and adapted for use by other Faculties where students are also involved in practicum programs during their study (ie. Teacher Education (Macquarie) and Nursing (La Trobe)). In turn, these Faculties could develop their own library of best practice learning designs for sharing with other universities.

Project Aim:

To develop contemporary medical curricula that meet student and employer (hospitals) needs, and provides the basis for ongoing personal and professional development for staff and students.

Project Outcomes:

- Six cohesive, e-learning Modules that demonstrate best practice in medical education. They will be based on pedagogically sound learning designs suitable for use by undergraduate School of Medicine students. These Modules will be developed, in close conjunction with medical content specialists by professional educational developers and e-learning experts, thus ensuring they will be effective learning designs in which good pedagogy has been embedded.
- Accompanying documentation that guides practitioners through the delivery of each of the Modules. This will help staff understand the rationale for using the Modules’ exemplar learning designs. This will facilitate the consistency of content, delivery and quality and will be an opportunity to demonstrate best practice in learning design.

- Sharing of the Modules through repositories and other communities, where relevant.
- Enhanced student engagement by introducing a range of readily accessible and relevant instruction in a flexible mode to accommodate variability in the time and place of student study (due to the requirements of hospital rotations).
- Creation of a community of educational developers, academic staff and medical professionals who are participants in the project, and are able to engage with staff in their own and other universities to disseminate the project outcomes.
- A series of workshops to promote the adoption of best practice and introduce a Learning Design approach, and sharing of experiences among practitioners.
- An online community (including promotion of discussion forums and repositories of learning designs) to support the project which will be available to the wider community.
- Research articles and conference presentations at national and international level.

Research Questions

The following questions will be addressed by this study:

- What is considered “best practice” for the teaching of the scientific basis of medicine within the field of medical education?
- What learning designs can be readily adopted by the Faculty of Medicine as a means of delivering best practice?
- How can the curriculum be delivered to facilitate students’ learning in relevant and connected ways when they are out on clinical rotation?
- What learning designs can be readily adopted by other disciplines as templates for best practice?
- How can identified barriers to academics’ adoption, adaptation and reuse of learning designs be overcome to ensure sustainability?

Further information will be uploaded to this website as results come in. The researchers are happy to answer any questions you may have via email on the addresses below:

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