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Presentations: a guide for the foundation year doctor

Introduction

There are various situations where you will have to give presentations. It could be during:

- Job interviews
- Teaching
- Grand rounds
- Conferences.

Preparation

You may have been given a topic to present or you may have an element of choice. Preparation is required whatever the situation, even if you know the material inside out.

Know your audience

Make sure you know who the audience is and ensure that you tailor the presentation to them: a presentation given to medical students will be very different from one given to peers.

Interviews

For an interview, you need to show that you understand the topic and have gained information beforehand on the organization, the specialty and the job. A Powerpoint presentation will normally be expected; some may allow overhead transparencies but it would reflect better on the candidate to use Powerpoint. The panel will only consist of a few people who are likely to be friendly and receptive, but this should still be considered to be a formal setting.

Teaching

Teaching may be aimed at medical students, doctors more junior than you, other professionals or peers. It is often relatively informal and does not require slides. It may be conducted at the bedside, followed by a session in the classroom or office afterwards. Flip-charts could be used, if available.

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Grand rounds

For grand rounds, your audience will be a mixture of students, junior doctors, staff and associate specialists, consultants and other professionals or staff. This will be formal, usually in a lecture theatre, with a Powerpoint presentation. It can be difficult to pitch it as you are talking to doctors of different specialties and levels of training. If in doubt it is better to keep it simple rather than trying to impress with your level of knowledge.

Conference

A conference presentation is, by necessity, formal. You may be presenting at a large plenary session or a smaller breakout workshop. Again, your audience could be very mixed, depending on whether it is a specialty- or subspecialty-specific event, or something more general. Your main focus should be to concentrate on your specific topic but you are likely to need a broad range of supporting knowledge.

Slides

Do not make your slides too crowded, as your audience should be focusing on what you are saying rather than reading the slides. Animation should be used with caution, as it can be distracting, can take up time and irritate people.

You may need to write out some prompts to hold in your hand. These could be on small cards that you can shuffle discreetly or on larger pieces of paper, although these can accentuate shaking hands if this is likely to be a problem. However, if you can talk fluently without prompts, it does give the appearance of being more knowledgeable about your subject area. This will require a lot of practice to ensure that you do not miss out any important areas of the presentation.

If you know your subject well, then you will feel more reassured. If not, then it is essential to read it up. Preparation is the absolute key here and should not be underemphasized. It can be intimidating if you are presenting to people who know

more about a topic than you do, but there will always be something they can learn from you.

Rehearse, either in front of colleagues or friends, but do not agonize over it too much. Check for timings and if your voice projects enough. If you will be presenting in a lecture-style environment in your own education centre, you may be able to practise in there.

Ascertain what the arrangements are on the day. You will need to know the venue, start time and the length of time available for the presentation and any questions. You will also need to know whether you should e-mail the presentation to the organizer beforehand or take it with you on a USB stick or other suitable medium. You will need to check whether your disc should be encrypted. Find out what will be done about paper handouts, or whether the presentation will be e-mailed to the recipients.

Giving the presentation

Formal presentations

For a formal presentation at a grand round or conference, arrive early for your allotted slot if possible. Test the technology, even if you already know how it works. Try to find an amenable staff member to help you if necessary. You need to be able to locate your presentation on the computer and get the image projected on the screen, and know how to progress the slides or revert. There may be a handset or you may need to use the keyboard or mouse. This may all sound very basic but it is important that you check how all this works before you start your presentation. Try to find a way to advance your slides without cutting yourself off from your audience or looking too awkward.

Your audience

Interact with your listeners – do not just stand there woodenly, talking at them. Gestures can work, particularly if this is natural for you, but do not go over the top. You may invite questions during the talk or afterwards, depending on what is appropriate. Some people use laser pointers, but if you do then do not waggle it around excessively on the screen.

Try to speak so that your voice reaches the back of the room. It helps if you imagine that the sound is coming from

your diaphragm rather than your larynx. This is anatomically inconceivable, but does prevent you forcing your voice and ending up hoarse. However, do ask for a microphone if you feel that you will struggle to make yourself heard. Pitch your voice low, talk slowly and do not be afraid to pause and draw breath – this will not be noticed. This is particularly useful if you feel that you are racing or that you are trembling.

Make sure that the audience can see you and the screen, and make eye contact briefly with different people as you talk.

Do not repeat the slide contents word for word – they should just be there as a guide. Instead, talk ‘around’ the subject, elaborating on the points made on the slide. Be clear whether handouts will be available (on paper or electronically), to lessen the chance of people scribbling frantically as you talk.

You need to keep to time unobtrusively, either by placing a watch or mobile phone where you can see it (White, 2010) or by ensuring that you can see a clock.

Do not be thwarted by awkward questions. There will always be a member who wants to show off his/her supposed cleverness. You can always turn the issue back on him/her, particularly if he/she is knowledgeable. This will give him/her the chance to shine even more (or appear a fool) and take the attention off you. If you do not know the answer to something, say so and invite others to contribute rather than fumbling through an answer.

If you have a trusted mentor or tutor present, ask him/her for constructive feed-

back afterwards. Enjoy the whole experience, learn from it and put it on your curriculum vitae.

Informal presentations

In an interview, there will be no time to test the technology. However, if you have e-mailed it beforehand, the presentation may be already loaded for you. Even though the panel knows who you are, introduce yourself along with the slides. Keep to time. You are likely to be asked questions at the end, but these should not be hostile. Ask for feedback afterwards on the whole interview, including the presentation.

Teaching may be arranged beforehand or at the last minute. You may be asked to stand in for another doctor who is unavailable. If appropriate and there is time, then you may be able to set up an electronic presentation.

Conclusions

Prepare well for your presentation, including the slides and technology, but do not be unduly worried. Speak slowly, pause when necessary and make sure everyone can hear and see you. Enjoy yourself. **BJHM**

Conflict of interest: Dr R Hooke has worked in both management and medicine. Her views are her own and do not necessarily reflect those of her employer or any other organization that she is associated with.

White T (2010) *The Doctor's Handbook Part 1: Managing your role beyond clinical medicine*. 4th edn. Radcliffe, Oxford

KEY POINTS

- There are various situations in which you have to give presentations.
- Tailor the presentation to your audience.
- Be able to talk ‘around’ the slides, do not just read from them.
- Do not be put off by seemingly awkward questions.
- Enjoy your presentation.