

Laying the foundations for good medical practice: a new educational resource

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Balancing service commitments with educational development is never easy. The European Working Time Directive and the Chief Medical Officer's report on senior house officer training bring new challenges. The Royal College of Physicians has developed 'Laying the Foundations for Good Medical Practice', a resource that enables tutors to teach generic skills to small groups of trainees in a fun and interactive way.

INTRODUCTION

What is it?

'Laying the Foundations for Good Medical Practice' (LTF) is a unique educational resource consisting of a portfolio of 12 training exercises (Table 1) (Royal College of Physicians, 2003a). It consists of two ring-bound folders with an accompanying guide designed to help tutors plan educational sessions (Figure 1). It was launched in April 2003 and has been welcomed by the Chief Medical Officers of England and Wales.

LTF takes postgraduate medical education away from traditional lunchtime meetings into interactive group seminars, which are more likely to fit in with new working patterns. The seminars are suited to the smaller groups that are available for learning, which result from the introduction of shift patterns of working to conform to the requirements of the European Working Time Directive (Department of Health, 2003a).

Who it is for?

The portfolio provides tutors with all the materials they need to run small group seminars. The exercises are primarily aimed at junior doctors in the 'foundation' years of training (i.e. pre-registration house officer and senior house officer (SHO) year 1), but have also been run with more senior SHOs and specialist registrars who have found them helpful.

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The exercises can also include multi-professional input and the resource may well benefit trainees from allied health-care professions.

Tutors who use the package will contribute to their accreditation and revali-

ation portfolio. Institutions will also benefit by improving patient care – a fact recognized by the Commission for Health Improvement (CHI) and the National Patient Safety Agency (NPSA).

TABLE 1
Content of Laying the Foundations for Good Medical Practice

Vol 1 Topic	Style	Learning objectives
1 Importance of keeping good notes: how not to be embarrassed by lawyers	Interactive seminar	To increase awareness of the importance of good note keeping
2 Improving discharge summaries: making sure they are accurate	Informal discussion	To improve the quality of information given on discharge
3 Improving discharge summaries: keeping GPs informed	Seminar with role play	Improve understanding of the need to make communications appropriate to the recipient
4 The value of proformas	Seminar with actors	To provide trainees with an opportunity to compare different methods of obtaining and recording medical histories
5 Monitoring the quality of records	Interactive seminar	To use audit as an effective tool to enhance quality of care, reduce the possibility of errors and manage clinical risk
6 Improving patient management through team-working	Seminar with role play	To understand the role of the ward-based multidisciplinary team in clinical management
Vol 2 Topic	Style	Learning objectives
7 Improving patient safety: avoiding prescription errors	Multi-disciplinary tutorial	To discuss avoidable prescribing errors
8 Improving patient safety: critical incident reporting	Interactive seminar	To highlight the importance of identifying medical mistakes as a tool to prevent similar errors occurring in the future
9 Supporting career development: how to get an interview	Interactive seminar	To help junior doctors plan their career. To improve job applications
10 Supporting career development: interview skills	Seminar with role play	To improve interview skills
11 Supporting career development: helping the trainee in difficulty	Seminar with role play	To recognize when a colleague is in difficulty and how help can be given appropriately
12 Addressing ethics and communication: steps towards PACES	Mock exam stations	To improve understanding of ethical issues and communication skills

PACES = Practical Assessment of Clinical Examination Skills

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What does it cover?

LTF covers subjects that are appropriate to all specialties:

- Medical record keeping and discharge summaries
- Audit
- Secondary uses of health information and data quality
- Written and verbal communication between colleagues and with patients
- Teamworking
- Patient safety – prescribing and critical incidents
- Career development – applications and interviews; helping colleagues in difficulty
- Ethics and communication – set out as a mock Practical Assessment of Clinical Examination Skills (PACES) station.

The generic nature of the material has led to the Academy of Royal Medical Colleges endorsing LTF through its information group.

What does it include?

Each exercise provides all the materials needed to run the sessions locally, including: background information, lesson plan, what is needed in advance and at the time, guidance notes, all handout material (the Royal College of Physicians (RCP) record-keeping standards need to be downloaded from the website and printed), references for further reading, and alternative approaches and suggestions for adaptation to local circumstances.

LTF includes the draft 'RCP record-keeping standards – inpatients'. These standards are derived from a review of evidence for record-keeping practices

Figure 1. 'Laying the Foundations for Good Medical Practice' consists of two ring-bound folders and a guide for tutors. There is also a support website.



that benefit patients directly or through improved performance of doctors (Royal College of Physicians, 2003b). They include templates for admission proformas and discharge summaries, and an audit tool for monitoring the quality of records. These documents are downloadable from the website and are used in four of the 12 exercises.

How does it work?

Tutors can review the lesson plan and background material in advance. The only other preparation needed is arranging a suitable room with flipcharts and/or PowerPoint facilities, and photocopying handout material.

The exercises generally suit up to 10 trainees facilitated by the tutor. Most last about an hour. Trainees are required to undertake tasks that will stimulate discussion and learning, including role-playing, individual and group working, interactive discussions, audit and brainstorming. Debriefing sessions encourage trainees to draw their own conclusions based both on their experiences and the exercises.

How will users be supported?

LTF is supported by a website that provides electronic versions of handouts and updates on further developments (Royal College of Physicians, 2003c). An interactive discussion forum is planned as well as a register of hospitals that have provided feedback.

A training course is planned, attendance at which will help tutors to maximize the effectiveness of the sessions. The course will be run alongside the 'Physicians as Educators' programme by the RCP's education department.

AETIOLOGY

LTF has been developed in two main phases over the last 3 years as a result of research into the generic training needs of junior doctors.

Learning to Manage Health Information

In 1999 a document was published that outlined the educational needs of all clinical professionals implied by the Department of Health's plans for modernizing information management and

technology within the NHS (NHS Executive, 1999). *Learning to Manage Health Information* has been endorsed by over 30 statutory and professional bodies, a level of consensus rarely encountered in medical politics.

After *Learning to Manage Health Information* was published, the NHS Information Authority provided funding for the medical Royal Colleges to develop curricula and resources that would support the development of skills in health information management and technology. In response to this, the RCP worked with a number of college tutors to develop the first six exercises of what was then known as 'Good Medical Practice – Recording Communicating and Using Health Information'.

Unfinished Business

By 2001 the package was almost ready, but the Chief Medical Officer had been leading a working party looking at SHO training and the results were due to be published any time (Department of Health, 2003b). This was expected to recommend that SHOs should complete a 2-year 'foundation programme' of generic subjects before progressing to basic and then higher specialist training. The opportunity existed to extend the package, which related to health information management, to cover a more comprehensive list of generic subjects.

DEVELOPMENT

Two processes were run in parallel:

1. Expansion to cover other generic subjects
2. Evaluation to ensure effectiveness.

RCP college tutors were contacted by letter and invited to participate. Over 50 tutors responded, and these were given more information about the project and asked to confirm commitment. The first 20 tutors who responded positively were asked to help with the evaluation. Six tutors specifically wanted to be involved with writing new exercises and they were invited to attend a brainstorming workshop.

Expansion

The brainstorming workshop identified a wide range of generic subjects that

needed addressing. This process was informed by identifying generic subjects within the SHO curriculum and Medical Masterclass (Royal College of Physicians, 2001). These were grouped into common themes and then scrutinized to see if they were appropriate to be taught through interactive seminars.

Volunteer tutors then developed exercises through a process of drafting to a standard template and local piloting.

The results of the evaluation were fed into the expansion process to ensure that any lessons learned were incorporated.

Evaluation

The authors piloted all exercises locally as part of the development process, and also piloted each other's exercises for more independent feedback.

In addition, four exercises relating to improving medical record keeping were piloted completely independently in six hospitals in England and Wales. Fifty SHOs returned feedback forms (85%), of which 100% (50) enjoyed the sessions; 98% wanted to attend similar exercises; 98% thought they learned something and 92% thought their future practice would change. Seventy four per cent of participants gave a rating of 4 or 5 out of 5 for the exercise they took part in.

External review

As well as the pilots, various external bodies were also contacted for their

comments and ideas. These included representatives from other colleges, CHI, NPSA and the Conference for Postgraduate Medical Deans. The Chief Medical Officers of England and Wales also provided their endorsement of the portfolio as a generic training package suitable for the foundation years of training.

FUTURE DEVELOPMENT

Horizontal and vertical expansion

There are two directions for future developments that are being considered. Horizontal expansion implies that more subjects will be covered at the same level (i.e. for junior doctors). This will require more input from tutors and a careful assessment of needs.

Vertical expansion implies similar subjects at a higher level (i.e. specialist training). This will require input from other colleges for both basic and higher specialist training.

E-learning

For both modes of expansion it is likely that future exercises will be available through the website. This may take the form of downloadable documents that need to be printed off locally to complement the existing paper portfolio. It may also involve shorter hospital discussion sessions that follow specific web-based learning modules, which trainees can do at their own convenience. A pilot site is being developed for an electronic version of one of the

career development exercises for evaluation by SHOs. Results from this will help to inform future e-learning environments for LTF.

CONCLUSIONS

LTF provides resources to complement local educational programmes and has been evaluated in many teaching environments. It has required the dedication of over 25 RCP tutors, their teams and audit departments. Their contribution cannot be overstated: without their donated time and persistent enthusiasm, LTF would never have been produced.

Using LTF will provide benefits to patients, trainees, tutors and NHS trusts, which has been recognized by the endorsing bodies. There are plans for future expansion and development. **HM**

Conflict of interest: LTF is being sold at cost price. The authors will not gain financially from this. Any profits will be put back into future development.

Department of Health (2003a) *European Working Time Directive*. The Stationery Office, London (<http://www.doh.gov.uk/workingtime/guidance.htm>)

Department of Health (2003b) *Unfinished business: Proposals for reform of the Senior House Officer grade*. The Stationery Office, London (www.doh.gov.uk/shoconsult/)

NHS Executive (1999) *Learning to manage health information: a theme for clinical education*. NHS Executive, Bristol (www.nhsia.nhs.uk/nhid/pages/resource_informatics/)

Royal College of Physicians (2001) *Medical Masterclass*. Blackwell Science, London (http://www.rcplondon.ac.uk/college/edu/edu_medicalmasterclass.htm)

Royal College of Physicians (2003a) *Laying the Foundations for Good Medical Practice*. Royal College of Physicians, London

Royal College of Physicians (2003b) *Draft RCP record-keeping standards - inpatients*. Royal College of Physicians, London (www.rcplondon.ac.uk/college/hii/records_standards)

Royal College of Physicians (2003c) *Laying the foundations for good medical practice: support website*. www.rcplondon.ac.uk/college/layingthefoundations

KEY POINTS

- Laying the Foundations for Good Medical Practice is a unique educational resource which has been developed by a team of medical educationalists and doctors for use in hospitals.
- It provides material for tutors to teach and train junior doctors in interactive group seminars, covering generic subjects including record-keeping, communication, patient safety and career development.
- It has been endorsed by the Chief Medical Officers of England and Wales, the Commission for Health Improvement, the National Patient Safety Agency, the Academy of Medical Royal Colleges and members of the Conference for Postgraduate Medical Deans.
- It facilitates the inclusion of nursing and allied health-care professionals in medical teaching.
- It contains record-keeping standards based on evidence of benefit to patient care.
- Using Laying the Foundations will result in benefits to patients, junior and senior doctors and organizations.

More information is available from the RCP publications department:

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