Clear and attainable learning outcomes are a prerequisite for teacher and student satisfaction

Richard Marz
Medical University Vienna, Austria

richard.maerz@meduniwien.ac.at

Successful medical students must attain more than just knowledge; they must become competent. Obviously, for the vast field of medicine this can only be achieved for a small sliver of the universe. Careful guidance and frequent feedback is necessary for students to navigate this infinite space and to provide a foundation for later, much more detailed, learning. Thus, the faculty must carefully select learning outcomes that are relevant and structure them to become attainable. The sum of all learning outcomes are the institutional goals. Students must be repeatedly challenged to explore their limits but in a responsible manner which ensures that they do not waste their time learning unnecessary details and procedures.

Students are members of a diverse population, just as physicians are, and this is the way it should be. Thus student satisfaction will depend on a variety of factors and never be unanimous. Responsible teachers should be more concerned with final learning outcomes than with immediate acclamation though in real life the latter will be hard to ignore. In general students will demand an efficient path to success, and success is measured as performance on the examinations. Students will also demand at all times a transparent connection between institutional goals and their personal goals.

Learning strategies that result in effective and sustainable learning must be encouraged by the faculty. Learning outcomes must be at the same time realistic and yet ambitious - a narrow path to be sure. Feedback must occur as frequently as possible. To be effective it must be cognizant of institutional as well as personal goals.

If this approach results in the mastery of meaningful learning outcomes, both student and faculty satisfaction is assured.