

Fostering the quizzing culture among medical students

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Competition, the cornerstone of evolution, has played a crucial role in shaping society into its current form. It exists in various colours and paints many aspects of our life through its (sometimes harsh) strokes. When taken in the right spirit, competition can galvanize us to work with greater sincerity and dedication. However, how does one ensure that it is taken in the 'right spirit' and does not become a source of distress? By making it fun! Randy Pausch famously said: 'Never underestimate the power of having fun.'¹ If competition and fun are combined, it can push us to newer heights while enjoying the way uphill.

In our experience at medical school, one thing that combined the elements of competition and fun with elegance was quizzing. Right from the first year, we are introduced to a form of quizzing that we have not encountered in school. Quizzing that was not focused on rote memorization or random trivia (kolstylz, as it is colloquially labelled), but had questions based on fascinating ideas and principles that invoked a feeling of awe once the answer was revealed. This was true for general/pop(ular) culture questions, and for medical quizzes.

As a first-year student, participation in such quizzes opens a new portal. When a mind that dreamt of becoming a doctor is compelled to memorize dry facts which do not seem to matter; for example, learning the enzymes mutated in rare genetic diseases or minute details of anatomy, it is easy to get disillusioned. The image of a medical school being an institution of rote learning can leave a lasting impact on impressionable minds, thereby making it difficult to wean them away from convenient cramming at the cusp of examinations, rather than appreciating the beauty of clinical medicine. A well-crafted quiz, one which makes us think laterally and apply learnt facts in a clinical context, can provide purpose and meaning to the listless (and unfortunately, inevitable) task of memorization, and aid us in learning medicine with greater depth and interest. A question of surgery that requires knowledge of basic anatomy to solve it motivates us to read anatomy more carefully, and it becomes a pleasurable activity too. Some collateral benefits arising out of a bustling quizzing culture include a healthier interaction with classmates and seniors, easier adoption of the new environment and a sense of inclusion—all of these may help first-year students to cope better with the strangeness and newness of medical school.

Organizing quizzes is a great learning experience and has academic benefits too, as one has to read various textbooks to dig up material that can be framed into questions. It also affords the opportunity to learn from the questions that are discussed

by the organizing team, even if those questions are not included in the final set. Most importantly, it makes us realize the effort put into making a good question: it is challenging to make questions that are different from conventional tests but have equal (or perhaps more) educational value. They are designed to be relevant as well as enjoyable. The ineffable joy experienced when the audience applauds a question is the cherry on top.

Making questions is a skill but organizing a quiz smoothly, without running into controversy, also requires considerable effort. Teamwork is required for publicity, fixing a venue, invigilation and score keeping.

Participation in quizzes can also contribute towards imparting essential life skills to students and help morph them into better doctors. Clinicians are expected to quickly extract important information from the patient and make accurate, timely decisions. Quizzes provide a similar adrenaline-filled atmosphere. The present culture of clinical medicine promotes working as a team—one must learn to listen to the opinions of everyone, decide together and share the joy or bear the brunt of every decision. This 'team spirit' is executed at a miniature level during team quizzing. Quizzing can also help fuel curiosity and make students explore new methods of learning, a trait that can help them as caregivers in a dynamic, ever-evolving system.

Given the benefits of participating in and organizing quizzes, we believe that colleges should embrace and adopt the quizzing culture. Students or interested faculty can regularly organize quizzes. It can be a monthly affair, thereby serving as an informal interim mode of assessment, and help in reducing the stress and burden associated with institutionalized tests. This can build an atmosphere of continuous learning: something almost all college students yearn to achieve, yet fail to find motivation for. Participation can be promoted by incentives such as certificates to add to their curriculum vitae or even small awards that the interested faculty or the institute can fund. These awards do not really matter though, as the point is to encourage and instil joy into learning.

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