



MEDICAL EDUCATION
SCHOLARSHIP CENTRE

Medical Education Scholarship Forum Proceedings

Emergency doctors think in spirals

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Background: Memorial recently introduced the Emergency Medicine (EM) Core Rotation for clerks. As adult learners, clerks will be expected to own their patients and follow them from presentation in the Emergency Department (ED) to disposition. We in Memorial's discipline of Emergency Medicine developed a mnemonic for prompting students to reassess their patients continually in the ED where time-sensitive interventions may be crucial. **Discussion:** Adult learning theory suggests that clerks should be practical, internally motivated and self-directed learners who appreciate practical outcomes. Teaching is best when students' learning styles preference are considered. Traditionally, clerks are taught to navigate a comprehensive and linear list of patient questions for presentation to their preceptors. These presentations can be lengthy and unfocused, and they can both omit key information and delay important interventions like giving analgesia. The ED is a unique teaching environment. Cognitive load is high and timely patient interventions are often critical. Though useful for the Internal Medicine service, the exhaustive traditional presentations taught to clerks are impractical in the ED. They omit important information that is essential to comprehensive and timely ED patient management. Mnemonics like RAPID and SNAPPS have been developed to assist clinical clerks to present cases concisely yet thoroughly in the ED, but they are linear and exist at one given point in time. To own their patients and follow them over through their ED course, clerks need to think in spirals, always re-evaluating priorities and circling back to critical problems while performing necessary interventions and remembering important details such as a patient's social situation and why they came to the ED on a particular day. We describe the SPIRAL mnemonic to assist in circular as opposed to linear thought processes.

S=Sick?

P=Pain?

I=Intervention/Treatment

R=Re-Resuscitate and

Re-Assess

L=Leaves the ED

Resuscitation is at the centre of the spiral and all interventions must circle back to it.

Conclusion: The SPIRAL mnemonic, developed by Memorial University's EM discipline, may be a useful addition to RAPID and SNAPPS. It adds the dimension of time to a linear framework, for clerks who are learning to follow their patients through their entire ED stay.