



CAME Voice/Voix

Unveiling the hidden curriculum

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Learning the “hidden curriculum” can be one of the most challenging aspects of medical school. It is interesting how something with such a strong presence in medical education remains so nebulous. This is likely because it depends on students’ personal challenges throughout their journey, which, by overcoming them, lead to formation of their professional identity. I recently had the opportunity to work alongside two pioneers of interprofessional education and leadership at the University of Manitoba: Dr. Debrah Wirtzfeld, a Surgical Oncologist, and Dr. Ruby Grymonpre, a Pharmacist. Their initiative involved offering Crucial Conversations® to senior healthcare learners with the goal of improving high stakes communication amongst healthcare disciplines. Undeniably, this is a key element of the hidden curriculum for many of us.

Crucial Conversations was developed by leaders in business to create open dialogue around risky topics to improve productivity and workplace morale. The course was offered on a voluntary basis to 40 pre-licensure senior healthcare students from all colleges in the Faculty of Health Sciences at the University of Manitoba. It consisted of one four-hour session per week in the evening for four consecutive weeks. Highly engaging instructional modalities, such as large and small group discussions, role-play, reflection, case studies, and coaching, were utilized. Students were asked to sit in small groups of four to promote collaboration. We found students were able to identify times when they used the skills taught in the course in either their professional or personal lives. Students also felt that the course improved their ability to collaborate interprofessionally, but still felt it would be a challenge to speak up in the face of hierarchy.

While this represents a step in the right direction, we need to ensure students feel empowered to speak up with concerns in the healthcare environment, a key component of the “hidden curriculum”. This initiative highlights two important lessons. First, creative utilization of available resources in the business sector, namely Crucial Conversations, can help to foster interprofessional collaboration: we don’t need to re-invent the wheel. Second, we need to ask ourselves why the “hidden curriculum” is still such an abstract concept and should we make efforts to begin formalizing it?

For more information on the results of the initiative: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13561820.2016.1215971>

For more information on the Crucial Conversations course: <https://www.vitalSMARTS.com/products-solutions/crucial-conversations/>

Conflict of interest: Dr. Delisle, Dr. Wirtzfeld and Dr. Grymonpre do not receive material benefit from the Crucial Conversations course.