

DISCOVERING “THRESHOLD CONCEPTS” TO BECOMING A MASTER CLINICAL TEACHER

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Background: A master clinical teacher (MCT) has been described as a clinical educator whose teaching “transcends ordinary teaching and is characterized by inspiring, supporting, actively involving, and communicating with students.” We believe that by delving deeper into characteristics of the MCT and discovering the obstacles encountered during the development of those features, we can help novice clinical teachers become more effective educators. We utilized the theory of threshold concepts (TC), which is used in the field of education and offers an analytical framework to investigate the core concepts that must be achieved in order to master a subject. Troublesome knowledge (TK) is an inherent aspect of TCs and represents areas of struggle or difficulty during the achievement of a TC. While the TC framework has been studied in higher education research, prevalent use in medical education has been much more recent.

Materials/Methods: This study is an integrated mixed-methods research using an exploratory survey, semi-structured interviews and focus groups. A systematic approach was used to develop the online survey, which was distributed via email to the faculty and trainees of the pediatrics department. In line with integrated mixed methods research, we then used the survey responses to inform the formation of the interview guides and process of the semi-structured focus groups and interviews. For the focus groups and interviews, we used purposive sampling of trainees, early career clinical teachers and pre-identified MCTs. The quantitative data was analyzed via descriptive statistics including central estimates. Thematic analysis was performed on the qualitative data using the TC framework to analyze for descriptive themes, which were then used to identify associated threshold concepts and areas of troublesome knowledge.

Results: Preliminary themes include: integration of educational opportunities into clinical workload, discerning varied educational needs of learners in a group setting, and accepting the risk associated with facilitation of learning.

Conclusions: The themes we have discovered highlight areas of difficulty in the achievement of skills required of a MCT. These themes represent areas of troublesome knowledge that clinical teachers might experience during their journey towards becoming a MCT. Identifying these TCs and the associated TKs to becoming MCTs can be used to inform faculty development effort or the individual career development of clinical teachers.

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