Performance evaluation is part of the daily routine of all clinical supervisors. It is key to the learning process. It is a key element in ensuring the success of practical training (Bernard & Goodyear, 2004). However, it is seen as the most stressful activity and the one that generates the most dissatisfaction in the supervision process (Bélair, 1996; Bogo, 2007; Mahara, 1998; Scanlan, 2001).

The evaluation process involves determining what the student has acquired in terms of knowledge, skills and attitudes and making a judgment on the gap between the performance observed and the established objectives. Performance evaluation must be based on solid principles if it is to achieve its purpose and if it is to identify where the student is situated in terms of his learning.

According to Legendre (2008), evaluation consists of understanding and clarifying the student’s achievement in such a way as to be able to decide justly what has to happen next.

In general, evaluation refers to: A process by which we define, obtain, furnish and communicate valuable information in order to guide the decisions to be made (Muller, 2002).

The supervisor and the student share responsibility for evaluating learning. Both parties must engage honestly and constructively in the process to identify the student’s strengths and difficulties so that he can progress (Kadushin, cited in Baird, 2008).

**Feedback**

Feedback is the preferred means of communicating formative and summative evaluations, but several elements need to be taken into account in order to organize and give feedback effectively. Feedback is provided throughout the clinical placement, after each activity or set of activities. It is provided more formally at the time of the mid placement and end of the placement evaluations.

It is important to remember that feedback is a two way process. Consequently, it is necessary to encourage feedback rather than require it. The student should be encouraged to speak with you about his progress, problems or concerns. The student should also develop his self evaluation skills.
In formal evaluations, the supervisor compares the student’s behaviour to the expected standards and provides feedback to the student, taking into account the self evaluation completed by the student prior to the meeting.

It is not easy to organize feedback to a student in order to communicate a true and clear message. We have relied on several consulted works to identify nine elements to be considered when formulating feedback (Bernard & Goodyear, 2004; Dolan & Schuler, 1995; Endrizzi & Rey, 2008; Gajptman & Anthony, 1993; Hattie & Templerly, cited in Stiggins, 2008; Kilbourn, 1990; Weisinger, 2000). Here they are:

**How to offer feedback: Nine content elements**

1. Confirm the student’s strengths.
2. Identify in a constructive manner the behaviours to be improved.
3. Define the obstacles to achieving the objectives.
4. Encourage the student to adopt other behaviours or actions.
5. Help the student motivate himself to change.
6. Facilitate the change.
7. Show commitment and interest.
8. Clarify the student’s perceptions about his performance.
9. Make sure to follow up.
1. **Confirm the student’s strengths**

Point out what has been accomplished. Avoid adding such conjunctions as “but”, “except”, etc. because of their restrictive implications. These words tend to cancel or wipe out the comment that has just been made. Instead, say something along the lines of “Now I would like...”

2. **Identify in a constructive manner the behaviours to be improved**

Tactfully express what has not been as successfully achieved. It is important to use a constructive comment limited to the behaviour that the student can change (e.g.: uses gestures a great deal). If the student’s accent makes communication less clear, then it is important to suggest, for example, that the student speak more slowly or articulate more, because an accent cannot be changed. Base your comments on fact. Show the link between the student’s behaviour and the objectives.

3. **Define the obstacles to achieving the objectives**

What sorts of problems are encountered in this type of situation? (e.g.: catheterization of an obese patient: “I know that it is difficult when the patient is obese”. Different clientele: “I know that the clientele is different from what you have seen before”.)

4. **Encourage the student to adopt other behaviours or actions**

Explain that there are other ways of doing things (e.g.: to be more effective), then suggest a plan that can be followed to acquire the competency:

- Skills (another way to do the technique)
- Knowledge (key questions to ask a specific patient)
- Attitudes (keeping spontaneity, all while adopting a professional manner when interacting with patients).
5. Help the student motivate himself to change

Explain why! Point out the benefits of solving the problem. For example:
- Ask the right questions in terms of patient safety so avoid a fall (knowledge)
- Practice the technique on one another in order to be comfortable and faster during a real life situation (know how)
- Acting in the way discussed with the supervisor will make the patient more confident in or receptive towards the student (approach).

6. Facilitate the change

Show the link between the observation and the solution. Offer suggestions on how to move forward. Use encouraging words: “Next time, give it a try!”, “You will see, it will be easier the next time.”, “It comes with time.”

7. Show commitment and interest

Use words, question and non verbal signals to show your sincerity. “What do you think?”, “Next time, I will be nearby to help you, if needed.”, or “Come see me if you would like to discuss other approaches”.

8. Clarify the student’s perceptions about his performance

For example, encourage the student to self evaluate, to suggest possible solutions. Confirm that the meaning has been effectively communicated by asking such question as: “Did you understand?” or “Is that ok?” or “Tell me what you understood”.

9. Make sure to follow up

Follow up provides a means of confirming the carrying out of an established plan, its success or the need to adjust it. It ensures that the student has implemented the proposed changes. To follow up effectively, the clinical supervisor must plan periods of direct observation, provide the student with guidance and offer additional feedback. It is important to point out successes or, if there are difficulties, to provide advice or to counsel the student if the behaviour does not change.
Despite the best of intentions...

Even with the best intentions in the world, performance evaluation includes some subjectivity and it can contain errors that may make it inaccurate. Being aware of this pitfall helps to avoid such mistakes.

Just keep in mind that to err is human!

The most common performance evaluation errors

Here is a summary of the most common mistakes made by supervisors when evaluating performance (Bernatchez, 2033; Dolan & Schuler, 1995; Morin, Murphy & Larocque, 1999; Turgeon, 1997).

(1) The halo effect is definitely the most common error when the evaluation covers several elements. The evaluator will tend to provide a total assessment of the student’s performance based on only one or two situations or aspects that he considers the most significant. He then projects those situations onto the entire evaluation. The student is under evaluated or over evaluated based on only one aspect of his performance.

(2) The leniency mistake (kindness) is the second most common error and is often a conscious decision. This type of mistake is also referred to as the error of extremes and amounts to the supervisor giving too much leniency to the student. The supervisor fails to take into consideration important elements and over estimates the student’s performance in order to avoid potential conflict. Poor definition of performance standards may lead to this type of mistake.

(3) The strictness error refers to systematically giving an unfavourable evaluation, regardless of the observed performance (the opposite of the leniency error). This is also called the error of extremes but, in this case, the supervisor is overly strict. This mistake is usually made by inexperienced evaluators, individuals who have poor self esteem, supervisors who have been recently promoted and who are trying to impress their superiors by their toughness, or persons using the performance evaluation to “settle accounts”.

(4) The central tendency error is seen among evaluators who want to avoid risk and keep their evaluations in the middle ground, even when the performance level falls elsewhere. An average rating is subject to too many interpretations. This type of error can be made when a supervisor is not able to observe the student’s behaviour directly or on a regular basis and he therefore evaluates him as average.

(5) The first or last impression effect refers to when a supervisor does not remember everything that has happened during the course of the placement (does not take notes). He uses his first impression to categorize the student as good or bad. He then looks for information likely to confirm his initial assessment and ignores information that contradicts that impression. In the opposite scenario, the evaluator may rely on the most recent information he has to make his evaluation. This is a double edged sword!
(6) **The contrast effect** occurs when the supervisor evaluates the student by comparing him to his personal performance standards. He judges the performance on the basis of the gap between what the student does and what he himself would have done. This mistake is also found when the evaluation given to the previous student influences the supervisor’s assessment of the current student. Thus, comparing one student to another whose performance was considered to be weak may give the impression that an average student is excellent, and vice versa.

Bernatchez (2003) describes the contrast effect differently. According to him, the evaluator’s evaluates to the extreme, always associating the student’s strong points with one that needs to be improved or vice versa. The student no longer knows what to believe because he is told that his performance is both excellent and weak according to different criteria.

(7) **The effect of past record** occurs when previous evaluations (good or bad) unjustifiably influence the current evaluation. This type of error can happen when a new supervisor has heard students discussed by the previous supervisor.

(8) **The error of similarity to the evaluator** refers to the tendency of some evaluators to over evaluate the performance of individuals with whom they share certain affinities.

(9) **Stereotypes** are negative or positive attitudes or preconceived ideas on the part of the evaluator about a person or a group of persons (sexism, racism, ageism, etc.).

The following sites provide useful information on the goals of performance evaluation, the principles of evaluation, types of evaluation, feedback (how to do it, what to say), etc.: www.mcgill.ca/hssaccess/two/supervision, www.practiceeducation.ca and www.preceptor.ca.

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