

**Problem formulation:** Teaching communication skills (CS) to residents during clinical practice remains problematic<sup>1</sup>. Clinical supervisors often do not master communication and teaching skills and are often poor role models. Direct observation of residents by clinical supervisors followed by feedback is a powerful way to teach CS in clinical practice. However, little is known about the effects of training supervisors on how to give feedback to residents about their patient CS.

**Conceptual and/or theoretical framework:** Studies done within this field are rare and have several deficiencies; they only measure perceptions, do not make use of pre-post control study designs and do not measure transfer.

**Research questions:** How effective is a training program for clinical supervisors on how to teach patient CS to residents in clinical practice?

**Description of the research methodology:** First, a needs assessment was conducted through focus groups among clinical supervisors and residents of both inpatient and outpatient settings. Second, a pretest-posttest controlled study was carried out in which clinical supervisors attended a program in teaching CS over a period of 6-9 months in which communication and teaching skills were trained simultaneously. Outcomes measures were the number and type of CS identified by clinical supervisors on three videotaped clinical encounters, the number of CS discussed in an interactive way and observed use of feedback skills during three objective structured teaching encounters. Finally, skill transfer was explored through semi-structured interviews among 26 trained clinical supervisors 3 to 6 months after training.

**Presentation of the main results:** The needs assessment was used to design the training program. 48 clinical supervisors participated (28 in the intervention group and 20 in the control group). Training had no impact on clinical supervisors' ability to identify poor or good CS used by residents but had positive effects on the number of CS taught in an interactive way to residents (effect sizes 1.36-1.77). In addition, trained participants significantly improved their feedback skills during the structured teaching encounters (effect sizes 0.93-4.94)<sup>2</sup>. Finally, factors facilitating transfer included characteristics such as opportunities to practice, involvement in teaching activities, supportive institutional procedures, a positive learning climate and motivation. Participants who reported teaching CS in practice were generally involved in structured CS teaching.

**Discussion of results:** A training program on how to teach CS is feasible, appreciated and effective in that it changes perceptions and behaviors and helps shift a paradigm change from a teacher centered to a more learner centered approach.

**Theoretical and practical implications:** Training supervisors on how to teach CS may be an effective way to improve the continuity of CS teaching between medical school and post-graduate training. To enhance transfer, training must be closely linked to regular formal and informal opportunities to practice CS teaching<sup>3</sup> and supervisors should be able to join a community of teachers where exchanges of experiences can take place<sup>4</sup>.

1. van den Eertwegh V, van Dulmen S, van Dalen J, Scherpbier AJ, van der Vleuten CP. Learning in context: Identifying gaps in research on the transfer of medical communication skills to the clinical workplace. *Patient Educ Couns* 2012.
2. Junod Perron N, Nendaz M, Louis-Simonet M, Sommer J, Gut A, Baroffio A, et al. Effectiveness of a training program in supervisors' ability to provide feedback on residents' communication skills. *Adv Health Sci Educ Theory Pract* 2012.
3. De Rijdt C, Stes A, van der Vleuten CP. Influencing variables and moderators of transfer of learning to the workplace within the area of staff development in higher education: research review. *Educational Research Review* 2012; Available online 7 June 2012.
4. O'Sullivan PS, Irby DM. Reframing research on faculty development. *Acad Med* 2011;86(4):421-8.