

# EXPLORING THE TUTORS' NEEDS AND PERCEPTIONS WITH CASE-BASED, PROBLEM BASED LEARNING IN FAMILY MEDICINE



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## Background

Problem-based learning (PBL) has become an increasingly popular pedagogical method for teaching Family Medicine, yet the training and support needs of the tutor has remained a relatively unexplored area. One key component to having a successful discipline-specific PBL program lies in the ability to have a team of enthusiastic and skilled tutors who can provide both content and facilitation expertise. The Family Medicine Unit at the University of Hong Kong (HKU) engages a number of honorary teachers who are community-based primary care clinicians to help provide the tutor numbers required to successfully run our PBL program. These teachers provide considerable content expertise but most only have limited experience in dealing with the group processes in PBL.

The aim of this study was to explore the needs and perceptions of our non-academic (honorary) Family Medicine PBL tutors, to identify useful strategies for enhancing tutor skill and satisfaction.

## Methods

All past and present honorary Family Medicine PBL tutors were invited to participate in a semi-qualitative study with questionnaire followed by one-on-one interviews. Survey respondents provided information regarding demographics and previous teaching experience. Interview questions were related to tutor satisfaction, tutor needs and perceived attributes of the ideal Family Medicine tutor

## Results & Findings

### Teacher Characteristics

Sex	4 Male: 5 Female
No.yrs teaching	1-10 yrs (avg. 5.85yrs)
No. tutorial sessions/ yr	2-20 (avg. 6 sessions)
Teaching experience	All did clinical teaching All did undergraduate and postgraduate teaching



### Most valued tutor training experience

- ❖ Observation of an experienced tutor
- ❖ Participation in a group tutorial as a student
- ❖ Mentorship/ on-on-one training by an experienced tutor

## Conclusion

Honorary teachers find PBL tutoring a satisfying and positive experience. The inter-personal and communication skills used by family doctors is a useful attribute for PBL tutoring. All teachers would welcome further support particularly in the form of peer-observation, peer-review, peer-mentoring and a tutor forum for sharing experiences. As PBL tutoring places the teacher in a unique situation of a small group of students over a period of time, mechanisms need to be in place to support honorary teachers who encounter students having personal problems.

### Difficulties & concerns encountered by tutors:

- ❖ Time management
- ❖ Out-dated references
- ❖ Students' poor participation and lack of interest
- ❖ Newer teachers expressed a lack of confidence in dealing with students' identified learning objectives, particularly if the topic was not in an area of their expertise.
- ❖ Self doubt about quality of tutoring

### Teachers' identified needs:

- ❖ More facilitation skills training
- ❖ Critical appraisal and evidence-based medicine skills training
- ❖ Tutor forum to share teaching experiences with other teachers
- ❖ Long term mentorship with an experienced tutor or faculty member
- ❖ A mechanism to deal with individual students who are identified during the tutorials as requiring psychological or other support
- ❖ Someone to talk to after having a difficult tutorial or dealing with a difficult student

### Other Findings

- ❖ All tutors perceived teaching as a positive experience mainly citing personal development and altruistic reasons for continuing teaching
- ❖ A number of teachers expressed the view that PBL facilitation had many similarities to the clinical Family Medicine practice, and found that their patient counselling skills were transferable to teaching.