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Lighting the Fire: novel perspectives in healthcare education

Are you tired of wasting your time earnestly imparting streams of important information to a crowd of impatient (or sleeping) healthcare workers? So are the infection control practitioners in Canada's Community and Hospital Infection Control Association's southern Alberta chapter (CHICA-SA). That is why we held a conference with professors from the University of Calgary Faculties of Nursing, Education, Medicine; an internationally renowned expert in social marketing; and even a professional actor who specializes in medical education. In the audience we had infection control practitioners, clinical nurse educators, clinical unit managers, and instructors from other learning institutions. The central themes of this conference were ways to engage our learners, the role of imagination and creativity, and the importance of conversations with our learner audiences and with ourselves.

The concept for this June conference in behaviour change called *Light the Fire* sprang from a number of initiatives that CHICA-SA chapter members have undertaken: applying a social marketing approach to promote hand hygiene (1); using live drama on patient care units to pass on important messages to astonished clinical audiences (2); and partnering with educators in medical and surgical programs to deliver interactive and engaging workshops (3). CHICA-SA members realized they still had a lot to learn and decided to use their biannual education conference to educate themselves and their community. We express our gratitude to the following sponsors: the University of Calgary Department of Medicine (speaking fees for François Lagarde); Ecolab (event luncheon); Deb Canada (personal-size bottles of Microsan® hand rub for all 150 participants); and 3M Canada's 2005/06 chapter award to CHICA-SA (speaker honoraria).

The speakers presented a broad range of topics. Peggy Patterson spoke about how different generations of health professionals learn differently. John Parboosingh explained how Communi-

ties of Practice allow learners to share successes and challenges encountered in daily practice. Brenda Paton and Roxie Thompson-Isherwood taught about the power of story telling for learning. François Lagarde, from the University of Montreal, inspired the audience to consider the steps of social marketing to address barriers and to increase benefits for behaviour change.

Although the topics covered seemed diverse, two themes quickly emerged. The first theme was conversations and dialogue. In his keynote message, Manuel Mah stated that "people don't listen, they re-load" while François Lagarde observed, "While educators want to tell people things, people don't care!" Having conversations rather than merely *telling people things* helps learners to make sense of new information and to use this information to enhance their own practice. However, creating opportunities for conversations requires some changes in how learning activities are structured. Brenda Paton urged educators to stop focusing on the *telling* and to reduce the content of their in-services by half. This creates space for the learners to have conversations and to discuss the relevance of the content to their practice. Betty Ann Henderson talked about the importance of social interactions in learning and encouraged educators to incorporate the life experiences of learners to build on their existing expertise. Learners are not a blank slate, but it is impossible to uncover their experiences if they are not allowed to talk. The sessions on social marketing and focus groups emphasized the importance of listening to the audience to discover their needs, wants, beliefs, and perceptions in relation to behaviour change. Ultimately, educators must honour the learner's perspective and learning style.

The second theme that emerged during the conference was abandoning fear to tap into imagination and creativity. Brenda Paton and Roxie Thompson-Isherwood urged the participants to uncover their fears in teaching since those fears

drive presentation styles. For example, a person who fears the loss of control may show a multitude of PowerPoint slides thus giving the audience no time for conversations or for questions. By letting go of fear it is possible to take the courageous step of engaging the imagination and creativity of yourself and your audience. While Betty Ann Henderson observed that learning is a creative process, Anita Mitzner warned that creativity is not a pretty sight: it is often more difficult and labour-intensive than conventional teaching methods, but also offers the potential reward of engaging learners and affecting practice. Examples of creative learning methods offered by the presenters included interactive games, drama and dance, video clips and story telling.

One of the best examples of creativity and imagination was shared by two of the seminar participants. Rosemarie Ivanovic and Diane Johnson are educators for three long term care facilities in Edmonton. When they heard a report from a family member that some staff members were using the same gloved hand to perform perineal care on residents and then to apply cream, they decided that some education was needed. The management team announced that the *glove inspector* was on the way, creating some apprehension and anxiety with the staff. On the appointed day the educator arrived, clipboard in hand. They had decorated a lab coat with all manner of gloves: black gloves, gardening gloves, barbecue gloves, and a corsage of latex gloves. The light-hearted *glove inspector* approached each staff member individually and the staff member drew a question from the glove inspector's bag. Amidst the fun and laughter, a correct response was rewarded with a vigorous shake from a maraca. Later at scheduled in-services the questions were discussed and the healthcare workers were able to reflect on the rationale and relate the content to their own practice.

Other helpful tips emerged from the speakers and the participants. Incorporate multiple perspectives in learning activities by including different generations on projects. Have learners create questions and answers on a particular topic and use those to create games for

other learners. Keep a digital camera that shoots video with you to film video clips, which can be archived until a need is discovered.

CHICA-SA members thank both the speakers and the participants for the opportunity to be challenged by the experts and to share knowledge with fellow practitioners. Hopefully new linkages were made, and new concepts will be taken back to influence practice and make learning in the healthcare setting more meaningful. ●

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