Utilizing Teaching Evaluations Creatively to Promote Faculty Development in Teaching

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Introduction

Faculty can improve their teaching practices through reflection with the use of data, guidance or consultation. Teaching evaluation scores (TES) are a readily available source of information about teaching performance. The literature suggests, however, that the processes associated with collecting and sharing scores with faculty favours its use for summative (e.g. promotions, maintenance of teaching responsibilities) rather than formative (e.g. teaching improvement) purposes.

Aim

- To describe how teachers currently use their teaching evaluations to reflect on their teaching

- To develop an understanding of how this information could inform further faculty development.

Methods

- Exploratory case study
- Participants included course directors (n=10) and a purposive sample of teachers (n=17) to represent a variety of teaching formats currently used in undergraduate medical education.
- 30 minute semi-structured interviews were digitally recorded, transcribed and analyzed on an inductive thematic basis.

Acknowledgements

Results*

Summative vs. Formative

- The importance of evaluations for both summative and formative purposes was emphasized. In general, it is felt that teaching evaluations are currently set up to support summative evaluation but that improvements can be made to increase their use for formative purposes.

Interpretation of results

- The range of numerical scores is quite 'tight,' with a very high mean score, which makes scores difficult to interpret; comments were described as being 'more useful.'
- Faculty tend to use TES as a 'check' to see that they are on the right track (keep doing what you are doing).
- Teachers tend to look for trends in their scores and comments over time.
- Teachers feel confident that if there was a problem with their teaching they would be notified in a timely fashion (no news is good news).

Reflection on teaching

To increase the usefulness of teaching evaluations in reflecting on teaching, the following suggestion were made by teachers
- *Identify the teaching encounter; make evaluations more timely*
- *Alert faculty when evaluations are available*
- *Encourage students to provide more (specific) comments*
- *Increase the validity of evaluations (e.g. strategies to increase response rate)*

*For the purposes of this poster we are reporting on the teacher data

"[The purpose of teaching evaluations is] to allow you to reflect with some feedback about how you taught and to modify your teaching in the future to make sure that the students are getting the best possible experience."

"you know, you're a 4.4 and then one's 4.41 and someone's 4.42 and someone's 4.39. So is that really different? I don't know. So how meaningful that is, I don't know."

"If every single student, almost every single student, filled out an evaluation and I received that evaluation in a timely manner, like within months after having it done, then that would be effective."

Discussion

A number of suggestions were made to link teaching evaluations and faculty development. For example, aligning FD offerings and categories on teaching evaluation forms (so that it is easy for teachers to identify a course relevant to their needs), and including this information with all teaching evaluations (i.e. not only targeted to those needing remediation). Interventions aimed at enhancing student opportunities to provide qualitative feedback may also be beneficial.