

Healthcare chaplain facilitated communication skills training for doctors: pilot study

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Background

As doctors in training become more senior, they are expected to engage in conversations with higher levels of complexity and emotional charge. The traditional 'see one, do one' model has left some middle grade doctors feeling under-prepared for this¹.

The Healthcare Chaplaincy team have specialist insight into compassionate and empathetic practice².

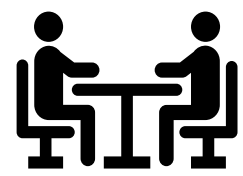
Literature search shows no examples of collaboration between medical and chaplaincy teams for communication skills training in the UK.

Aims:

- To better prepare doctors transitioning to 'middle-grade' roles with regards to communication skills
- To bring in fresh perspectives and facilitate a multi-disciplinary approach by utilising the skill of the Healthcare Chaplaincy team.

Methods

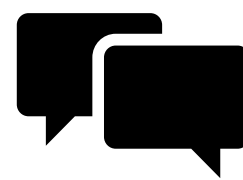
In the pilot study, 8 middle grade doctors took part in an individual training session over a 4-month period. The session took place during their working day.



Pre-brief³ - Chaplain led, checking in with participant and preparation for activity



Simulation - 20 minute phone call with an actor, complex or emotionally charged scenario



Debrief - Reflective practice focussed on communication instead of clinical content

Data was collected both during the debrief and via subsequent feedback form.

"I will be more mindful of what the patient or family is expecting"

"In the future I will be more careful to try to find the correct words"

"The use of communication in a therapeutic manner"

"The debrief gave me insight into my humanity"

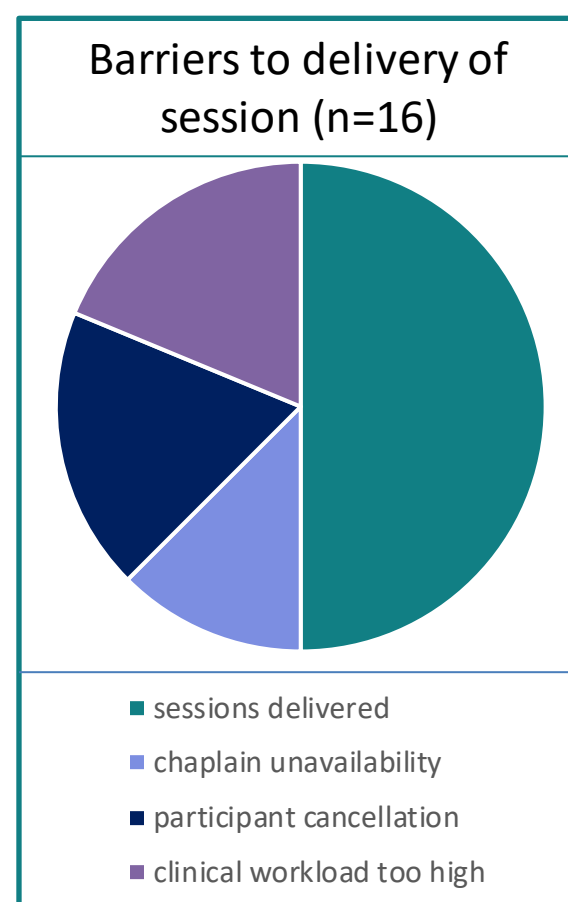
"Managing tone of voice and directing the conversation"

Results

All trainees felt the session was useful and were able to give examples of learning points. Every participant described how their practice would change following the session.

3 main themes emerged during both the debrief and feedback form, as exemplified in quotes above.

- Vocabulary and word choice
- Compassion and empathy
- Techniques for guiding the consultation



Discussion

A **novel collaborative** training session enabled middle grade doctors to **identify areas of improvement** in their communication skills and create **action plans** to improve their future practice.

Main themes emerging during reflection were **word choice, empathy** and **consultation skills**. These values align with the National Framework for Wellbeing and Spiritual Care² and Scottish Partnership for Palliative Care recommendations¹.

Challenges that arose centered around embedding the session in a **busy clinical environment**. Further tests of change could focus on how this could be overcome.

References:

- 1- Scottish Partnership for Palliative Care (2018). Building on the best in Scottish acute hospitals.
- 2- Healthcare Quality and Improvement Directorate (2023). Discovering meaning, purpose and hope through person centred wellbeing and spiritual care: a national framework.
- 3- Somerville, S. G., Harrison, N. M., & Lewis, S. A. (2023). Twelve tips for the pre-brief to promote psychological safety in simulation-based education. *Medical Teacher*, 45(12), 1-8