

## CORRESPONDENCE

### Peer-teaching: an Effective Learning Experience?

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**This article describes the peer-teaching strategy applied in the gross anatomy course to first year medical students at the San Juan Bautista School of Medicine.**

*Key words: Peer-teaching, Tutorial program*

Peer-teaching strategy has been used at the San Juan Bautista School of Medicine since its foundation as well as at other medical, dental, and nursing schools in the United States and Canada (1-2). Institutionally, the Tutorial Program involving the individual bio-medical science courses has been in effect for over ten years. This Program is a formalized teaching tool used in our institution, in which students are assigned to a peer tutor who guides them under the direct supervision of a faculty member. Institutions that use peer-teaching have reported improvement in study habits, better attitudes towards the course, and better communication with peers (3). Problem-based Learning used at other institutions uses peer-teaching in which the participants support peers and work in groups (4).

In the Developmental and Clinical Anatomy course, we instituted peer-teaching by grouping at random 8 to 9 students per cadaver for dissection, interacting with each other for individual as well as group benefit. The discussion in the dissection period is lively with the direct involvement of the anatomy faculty members. These same groups work together in other bio-medical sciences courses, clinical anatomy cases, and problem solving. Three cases were assigned to each group. The groups met and interacted during the laboratory periods, and after regular class hours. They researched library resources including the Internet, journals, medical texts, and consulted faculty members.

The groups worked together, analyzed, discussed in detail, allocated duties to peers, integrated the material

with other courses, and shared their findings and final conclusions prior to the oral presentation with the faculty and classmates. Faculty members evaluated and graded their final presentations.

An assessment of the peer-teaching strategy in the developmental and clinical anatomy course was performed to obtain student opinion in different aspects of the peer-teaching process. The results of the survey and interviews of the students revealed that the peer-teaching experience positively affected their performance; helped them to better understand the material; promoted peer collaboration/cooperation; and academic integrity and honor code were observed during the process. The students expressed that peer-teaching is an effective learning experience; that they felt more confident asking questions and discussing doubts, and feel more at ease when dealing with peers than with faculty. They recommend its continuation in the developmental and clinical anatomy course with the proviso that the group size be reduced.

The San Juan Bautista School of Medicine appreciates the participation of the students in the decision making process. The Anatomy Department will continue with the peer-teaching process in the course. The number of students per table depends on the amount of cadavers assigned to the Medical School by the Puerto Rico Board of Anatomy; however, working groups will be organized into 4-5 students each to optimize peer participation.

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