

PACE Palette: Teaching Interpersonal and Communication Skills

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Setting and Problem

Residency programs often face a knowledge gap in how to teach communication and teamwork skills. These skills are needed in multiple areas and are emphasized in the Clinical Learning Environment Review pathways document. Examples include residents engaging in quality improvement activities, ideally in team settings, and transitions of care, when clear communication is critical.

Intervention

To build an effective team, multiple different personality styles or “temperaments” are needed. These personality types, coupled with understanding how people prefer to work, take in information, and interact with others, are instrumental in ensuring team effectiveness. Taking a personality test can last several hours, and the test can be difficult to interpret. As an alternative to formal personality testing, the author identified the PACE Palette, taken from the business world to facilitate a quick and efficient way to identify personality types, scaled down into 4 major “colors” (“temperament” styles).

The PACE Palette can be used to improve emotional intelligence by enhancing both social awareness and self-management. Additionally, it is marketed as a teamwork tool. The tool is used to identify personal temperament styles, represented by 4 color-coded themes: red, yellow, green, and blue. Annually, the pediatrics and medicine-pediatrics interns at our institution participate in a 2-day retreat. The retreat is supported by the Department of Pediatrics. In 2006, a 1.5-hour workshop was inserted into the retreat to provide for a targeted teaching opportunity. We conducted a 3-year trial of a workshop using the PACE Palette. The workshop consisted of (1) identifying personal temperament (What is your primary “color”?); (2) giving participants time to explore the specifics of individual temperament (How are people of the same color similar?); and (3) discussing the strengths and weaknesses of each temperament style. Examples and open-ended questions were used to demonstrate how each of these colors is equally important to functioning in a “team environment.” At the conclusion of the retreat, resident feedback about the workshop was solicited.

An initial grant provided materials for self-training tools for the facilitators (\$80) and PACE Palettes (used for

identifying temperament style) for 3 classes of interns (\$12 per palette). Faculty teaching time was donated.

Outcomes to Date

During the initial 3-year trial, 94% (65 of 69) of pediatrics and medicine-pediatrics interns attended the retreat, and 100% (65 of 65) of the attendees participated in the workshop. Qualitative feedback obtained showed interns’ perception of the workshop was extremely positive. Participants expressed enjoyment in learning in a relaxed environment and participating in a less structured and more interactive setting, and they voiced their value in the education. Overwhelmingly, desire was expressed to maintain this activity as part of the intern retreat. One interesting comment was, “All faculty and residents should wear their ‘color’ on their badge so I can know better how to interact with them.” Several classes of chief residents (who did the workshop in their intern year) now attempt to predict what color each incoming intern will be, prior to participating in the workshop. The effects of the workshop remain evident years after interns attend the workshop. Positive comments and subjective evidence of the lasting impact of this project have motivated leadership to continue to financially support this workshop for future intern classes at the retreat.

Since the initial trial, an additional 6 years of the workshop have taken place, with a total of 210 residents having participated from 2006 through 2014. The cost to continue this workshop is a nominal fee (\$12 per attendee) for the purchase of PACE Palettes.

Our workshop was originally designed to teach the competency of interpersonal and communication skills. It fulfilled this original intended goal, but today we also use this unique, easy-to-administer workshop to meet the evolving needs of our residency program.

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