

## Learning by Example for University Medical Students

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Third year medical students at the University of Birmingham are learning to perform female pelvic examinations with the help of women who have been recruited and trained specifically to be teachers of these skills.

Gynaecological Teaching Associates (GTAs) learn how to do these examinations so they can teach the students in a practical session, providing feedback about their competence and sensitivity and helping them overcome any fears they may have.

Professor Jim Parle, Head of Health Care Development at the University, says this is an innovative training programme: "Those of us who are doctors will remember very well the blind panic we felt when we had to do our first internal examination on a female patient. Not surprisingly it was pretty embarrassing for the patient too. That's why at Birmingham we believe students should do their first examination on a simulated patient who has been trained to give feedback: in effect to be the teacher."

Medical students need to be able to carry out these examinations confidently and appropriately by the time they graduate from Medical School. Previously, students learnt the technique on a plastic model and only when the opportunity became available were they able to practise on a human who has consented.

The GTAs are trained by Miss Shirin Irani, a consultant gynaecologist at Heart of England Foundation Trust. They work in pairs with a group of four to six medical students. The three hour session begins with an introduction, some tuition on plastic models and some video footage. Students then practise the examination technique on the GTAs, with one acting as 'patient-teacher' and the other as a 'chaperone-teacher'.

Karen Barry, Co-ordinator at the Interactive Studies Unit at the University, says: "A GTA is very much an educator who shows and guides the students how to perform an appropriate pelvic examination. It is a very rewarding experience and the students are always very thankful for this teaching."

The advantages to students being trained in this way are numerous. GTAs are women who want to help the doctors and health professionals of the future. The GTA is able to provide feedback on whether the student is actually finding the cervix. They provide a relaxed environment where students get real-life, hands on experience and sensitive and constructive feedback in a genuine setting.

Ultimately, says Professor Parle, one of the most important advantages is patient confidence: "The real patient in the clinic or surgery, often themselves nervous about the examination or about what might be found, can be certain that our students already have the basics, and will perform the examination professionally."

Ends

### Notes to Editors

A pelvic examination is a complete physical exam of a woman's pelvic organs by a health professional. It is an important part of health care for all adult women. Pelvic examinations are done to help detect certain cancers in their early stages, infections, sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), or other reproductive system problems.

All students studying on the medical course must be able to carry out these examinations by the time they graduate from Medical School.

### Further Media Information

Professor Jim Parle is available for interview, please call the Press Office on 0121 414 6029 / 07920 596946

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