

Student Experiences Learning in Specialty Cohorts during a Transition to Residency Course- Context, Safety, and Connection Matter

Purpose:

Transition to Residency (TTR) courses, designed as high-intensity multidimensional skills courses to prepare graduating medical students to effectively function in their new roles as interns, have been shown to improve trainee confidence, knowledge, and skills. TTR courses are recommended by professional societies and are increasing in prevalence. Specialty-specific just-in-time training has been recommended to support the residency transition and many medical schools provide specialty-specific components of their course to optimize internship preparation. The University of Colorado School of Medicine's TTR course is uniquely delivered entirely within 7 specialty-specific contexts (Anesthesiology, Emergency Medicine, Family Medicine, Internal Medicine, OBGYN, Pediatrics, and Surgery). The session goals and objectives are similar, but the context and content are specific to the specialty. Learners self-select the specialty and remain in the same specialty learning cohorts of approximately 16 students throughout the 4 weeks of curriculum.

Objectives:

Applying a phenomenological qualitative approach, we sought to understand the educational experience of students learning within specialty-specific contexts and specialty cohorts during a TTR Course.

Methods:

Through block randomization by specialty cohort, a convenience sample of 60 medical students in the University of Colorado TTR Course were selected and invited via email to participate in focus groups. Five focus groups were conducted with 33 of the 60 invited students participating. Of the 33 participants, 29/33 (88%) were in a specialty-specific cohort concordant with their matched residency. The semi-structured interviews focused on two domains: (1) understanding the learning experiences and educational impact of the course and (2) understanding the unique attributes of specialty-specific instruction, context, and cohorts. The transcripts were transcribed and reviewed for clarity. Three coders, through an inductive coding process and consensus discussion, created a common set of codes that were applied through a constant comparative method.

Results:

Five Themes were identified.

- 1) Learning within consistent cohorts promoted interpersonal connection, learning safety, and peer sharing of individual experiences.
- 2) Specialty-matched peers were valued due to their aligned experiences and perspectives.
- 3) Specialty-specific content enhanced engagement and was most valued when relevant to the intern year.

- 4) Specialty-specific instructors had valuable approaches, experiences, and perspectives.
- 5) Students entering a specialty different from one of the 7 specialty cohorts valued content relevant to their internship, but also as desired content delivered in the context of their matched specialty.

Conclusion:

The unique pedagogical approach to this TTR course, designing sessions with common learning objectives adapted and delivered entirely with specialty-specific contexts and learner cohorts, has numerous learning benefits. Specialty-specific context and faculty expertise promote learner engagement. Learning in cohorts enhances psychological safety, fosters connection with peers and faculty within matched specialties, and allows for discussion of shared experiences which cultivates professional identity formation via socialization. Students entering specialties not represented by the learning cohorts may experience less specialty-related personal connection, however, still value any content relevant to their planned internship. Specialty-specific content, faculty, and learning cohorts optimize student learning by enhancing engagement, connection, and safety and should be considered in guiding educational design strategies for residency preparation courses.