

Teaching the teacher-why is so important?

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Introduction

In spite of the fact that each physician, all over the world, graduated a 6 or 7- year medical school, there is a permanent need for continuous learning, since medicine is a profession in permanent progress and each of us must assure adequate quality of patient care and also public accountability.

In a bilingual book (English and Hebrew) published in 1992 (“Education and teaching in Anesthesiology in Israel) I wrote that “ society expects to see a specialist operating in the framework of modern, up to date medicine, and who is aware of the many innovations in every field”.

Self learning or participation to scientific conventions and refresher courses proved to be valuable tools, but neither one can offer a real method for creating real up to date knowledge and skills.

Recertification, as it is practiced nowadays in the USA, seems to be the closest framework to what the medical system is supposed to offer regarding the patient safety and modern care. But the question is how could we keep ourselves in good shape between two recertification examinations, which is held once every 10 years?

Teaching means not only hard working gifted students but also, or mainly, good teachers, coaches and guides, who would be able to teach, to inspire and (why not?) to serve as role-models for their younger colleagues.

These were the thoughts on which the 15-year Beer Sheva educational project was started in the early 1990s. It was created to help closing the gap between the modern medicine practiced in the western hemisphere of the world and that part of Europe which was for almost half a century under the communist regime. The Beer Sheva project, entirely financed by the WFSA, exposed young Eastern Europe anesthesiologists to the modern aspect of our profession, by offering a direct view to daily activities of a busy up to date Israeli hospital. More than 150 young physicians, from ten countries, took part to the project.

The project did not include a follow up system in order to know what happened to each of those anesthesiologists who spent between 1 month and 1 year at Soroka Medical Center in Beer Sheva, but we do know that some of them became directors of anesthesia departments, chiefs of professional units, organizers of congresses and conventions. We also know that some 20–25 % of them found the way to Western Europe and they are currently employed by a foreign department.

We soon realized that in spite of the efforts and financial resources we could not completely close the gap between the two kinds of medicine practiced on both sides of the former Iron Curtain. Beside, things changed a lot in the last 10 years and the professional contacts between the two parts of the continent became routine in both ways.

The idea was to find a new way to implement modern medicine, techniques, organization and also mentality among the new generation of anesthesiologists in Europe, not only in former communist countries but also in some other regions of the continent.

The permanent contact with our profession all over Europe showed very clearly that one of the feeble points of educating the new generation of specialists was the use of old methods to teach new things. Once the needs for basic equipment and drugs have been solved and the access to up to date information ceased to be a problem, we felt that one has to take care of the system of teaching, the way the practical information is transferred and skills are taught.

The International School for Instructors in Anesthesiology (ISIA)

These thoughts led to the creation of a new project, of “teaching the teacher”, an international institution (The International School for Instructors in Anesthesiology-ISIA) with the aim of preparing in a restricted number of countries, a group of instructors, who would be exposed to the modern ways of teaching theoretic and practical subjects, as well as main aspects of organizing our profession.

The core of the established curriculum was to teach the new way of lecturing clinical subjects, based on description of real cases, but also including the evidence base data and basic sciences knowledge. Soon the curriculum was enriched by adding a long series of subjects related to educational skills and anesthesia organization items.

The first ISIA course took place during the years of 2006–2007, in Bratislava and Belgrade, three classes, each of one full week of presentations, skills teaching and discussions regarding various aspects of our profession. It was sponsored by the World Federation of Societies of Anesthesiologists (WFSA) which covered all the expenses except the students traveling.

The “students” of ISIA 1 were all young anesthesia specialists from five countries (Moldova, Serbia, Slovakia, Poland and Bulgaria), four from each country, selected by their national societies of anesthesiologists.

The admittance criteria were: full training in anesthesia, good

commend in English and the obligation to attend all three classes (organized at intervals of 6 months each). But the most important point was each candidate commitment that after graduating the ISIA classes, similar national courses would be organized in their own countries.

The ISIA faculty included experts in the art of teaching as well as some well recognized European anesthesiologists in various fields of anesthesia and its domains of interest.

The timetable included case presentations and discussions (prepared in concordance with the modern demands of clinical teaching), special sessions of teaching educational skills and also frontal lectures on topics related to the organization of our profession.

The ISIA 2 took place between the years 2009–2010. It included five more countries: Romania (the host country), Slovenia, Macedonia, Greece and Hungary. The European Society of Anesthesiologists (ESA) decided to join the project and co-sponsored it together with WFSA.

Nineteen more specialists attended the three classes and graduated the course and they all became experts in teaching.

ISIA nr 3 is on its way, just after the Erlangen convention. The first class (out of three) will take place in the island of Crete and it will be attended by 24 “students” (coming from Croatia, Malta, Lithuania, Latvia, Georgia, Turkey and two more Greek physicians) actually all of them specialists in Anesthesiology in their own countries. One of the most important aspects of the ISIA current activities is the fact that by today, except the Faculty chairman, all the teachers are alumni of ISIA 1 and 2 and they perform on a high level, being able to transmit to the students the skills learned in the past in the ISIA framework.

Can we measure the results?

All 38 students graduated the three classes of the 1st and 2nd ISIA course and got a final diploma. At the end of the 3rd class all of them proved to be dedicated teachers, able to bring the knowledge obtained at ISIA to younger colleagues in their own countries.

As a result, during the following 2 years similar courses have been organized in each of the participant countries and some 150–170 young specialists, all together, took part to these national courses organized by the ISIA 1 and 2 alumni.

This might be called “the snowball effect”, since every year more and more European young anesthesiologists benefit from the knowledge and skills obtained at ISIA by training system initiated and promoted by ISIA.

In order to quantify the results of our teaching system, a questionnaire was sent last January to all 38 alumni of ISIA 1 and 2. They have been asked to describe their feelings towards the teaching program at ISIA, and also to define the kind of teaching they performed after graduating the three classes.

Thirty two out of 38 graduates filled up the questionnaire.

When they have been asked to define their abilities to teach before the ISIA classes 41 % witnessed that they have never been taught or instructed how to teach before the ISIA first class and 47 % feared of teaching because of lack of skills and lack of communication with the audience. Eighty percent used to present and discuss clinical cases in the “classical” way, with no real case presentation, but rather copying the textbooks and transferring the abstract notions on the slides.

The results speak about a tremendous improvement in the alumni’s ability to teach after the three classes. Absolutely all of them felt that they significantly improved the quality of teaching and most of them increased their activity as teachers in their own departments, hospitals, National Societies and even on a continental level.

Conclusions

We have been born without any skill in teaching.

Teaching, like driving, is to be taught and ISIA seems to be the first and by now the only educational project regarding the training of the teacher in all the medical world.

The idea was recognized by the international organizations as a valuable one and the trend is to extend its activities all over the old continent.

A South American initiative to implement the ISIA project on that continent is to be discussed next March in Buenos Aires, with the occasion of the next World Congress of WFSA.

The ISIA goal is NOT to create an elite of young specialists who would keep their skills for special occasions, but rather to implement the “snowball effect” in the sense that each group, in its own countries, would create the necessary framework for perpetuating the ISIA principles and extend the art of teaching to as many as possible young colleagues. A British philosopher once wrote that the real difficulty in changing the course of any enterprise lies NOT in developing new ideas, BUT escaping from the old ones. The tremendous progress initiated on the European continent in the last years regarding teaching anesthesia seems to respond to this clever saying