

## Role modelling in medical education

“The example of the teacher is the most powerful influence upon the standards of conduct and practice of every trainee, whether medical student or junior doctor” GMC (1999)

Role modelling is a powerful form of learning and an integral part of medical education, particularly in the transmission of values, attitudes and behaviour. Much of this learning takes place unconsciously and can transmit negative as well as positive effects. Equally many teachers are unaware that they are modelling “on the job”.

In general practice teaching roles are superimposed onto complex clinical, administrative and personal demands. GPs attend to complex medical and psychosocial problems in short consultations, making decisions from focussed information gathering with concise documentation. Modelling this role positively is therefore paramount when we are teaching medical students and this begins with awareness of ourselves as role models.

“The admonition in the old aphorism ‘Do as I say but not as I do’ seldom works. What we do is more likely to have more impact on learners than what we *tell* them to do”

Westberg and Jason (1993)

### → What makes an effective role model? <sup>i</sup>

#### Clinical competence

- Excellent knowledge and skills
- Effective communication
- Sound clinical reasoning

#### Teaching skills

- Aware of role
- Explicit about what is modelled
- Makes time for teaching
- Shows respect for student needs
- Provides timely feedback
- Encourages reflection in student

#### Personal qualities

- Compassionate and caring
- Honesty and integrity
- Enthusiasm for the practice of medicine
- Effective interpersonal skills
- Commitment to excellence
- Demonstrates humour

### → What do students value in a role model?

Ambrozy et al (1997)<sup>ii</sup> looked at the most important physician characteristics found in role models identified by students, areas that lend well to GPs:

- Expresses enthusiasm for specialty
- Demonstrates excellent clinical reasoning skills
- Establishes close doctor- patient relationships
- Views the patient as a whole

They identified the following as important teacher characteristics:

- Expresses enthusiasm for teaching
- Actively involves students
- Communicates effectively with students

Attributes that are not valued in role models include research excellence, publications, senior management roles, power, status and high earnings<sup>iii</sup>.

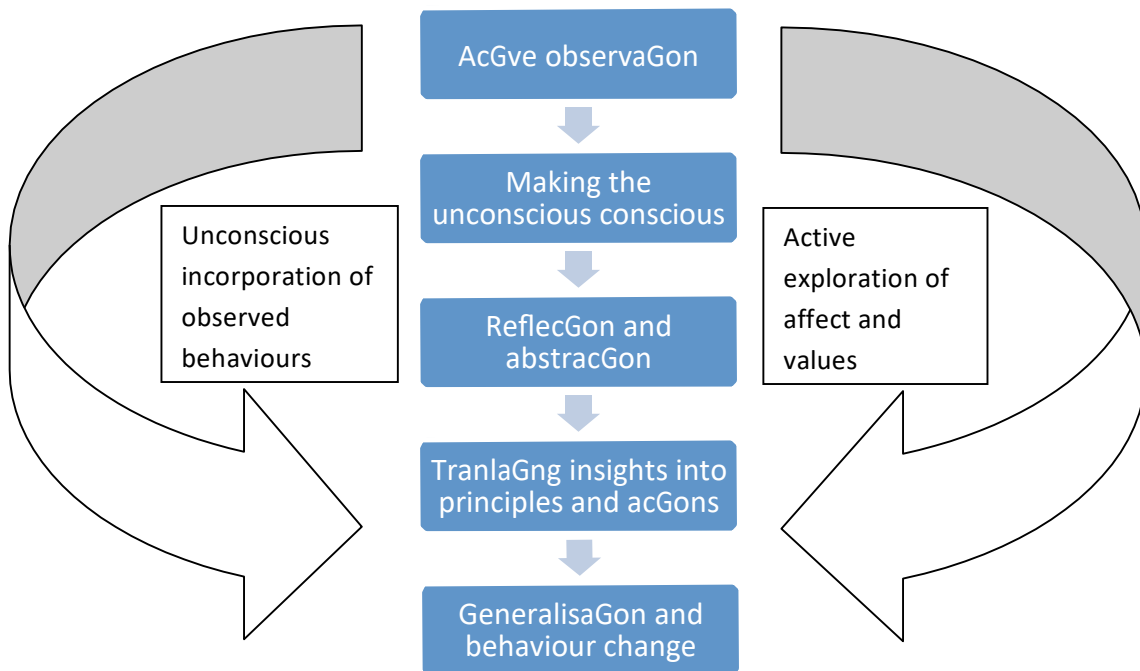
### → How can we improve our role modelling?

#### Strategies to improve role modelling<sup>i</sup>

- Be aware of being a role model
- Demonstrate clinical competence
- Protect time for teaching
- Show a positive attitude for what you do
- Implement a student centred approach to teaching
- Facilitate reflection on clinical experiences and what has been modelled
- Encourage dialogue with colleagues
- Engage in pertinent staff development and work to improve the institutional culture
- Whenever possible be explicit about what you are modelling

### → Making the unconscious, conscious<sup>i</sup>

Role modelling is often an unconscious process both in transmission and receipt. However, where this process is reflected upon, to draw out both positive and negative aspects of behaviour, then explicit learning can take place.



### → In summary...

If we can be enthusiastic, emphasise the strong and holistic doctor-patient relationships we nurture in general practice and demonstrate sound clinical reasoning, we can encourage the learning of these skills in our students. We need to actively involve students and be aware of ourselves as role models at all times. Where students observe positive and negative behaviours, exploring these and reflecting on the values and beliefs underpinning such behaviours, can unlock even more powerful learning.

<sup>i</sup> Cruess, S.R., Cruess, R.L. and Steinert, Y. Role modelling- making the most of a powerful teaching strategy. *BMJ* 2008; 336:718-21

<sup>ii</sup> Ambrozy, D.M., Irby, D.M., Bowen, J.L., Burack, J.H., Carline, J.D. and Stritter F.T. Role models perceptions of themselves and their influence on students' speciality choices. *Acad Med* 1997; 72: 1119-21

<sup>iii</sup> Paice, E., Heard, S. and Moss, F. How important are role models in making good doctors? *AMJ* 2002; 325: 707-10