Roadmap for a successful teaching encounter
the master cognitive map

Learning objectives:
• Learn a master cognitive map that you can use for outpatient and inpatient teaching
• Understand how the Oncotalk Teach program is designed around the map

Introduction:
We think that teaching communication skills, whether inpatient or outpatient, whether teacher talks or learner talks, can be described in a single cognitive map. We’ve been using and refining this map for years, and find that as teachers it helps us mentally structure our work. The map is simple: a teaching encounter has a beginning, middle, and end. A couple of examples are in the table on the next page.

Beginning the teaching encounter: Setting useful goals
Opening a teaching session requires a few key activities that will set the stage for the rest of the entire session. Opening a session will be necessary whether you have worked together many times or whether it is a new relationship. How much time you spend during the Opening, and what you do, will depend on how long you have for the teaching session (3 minutes? an hour?) and how well you know each other.

A teaching session often comes in the middle of a busy day, or is set among competing demands. Your job as teacher is to prepare the fellow for the work that is to come. This requires engaging the fellow by asking about their goals, choosing a goal to work on, and ensuring that the fellow has a strategy to try that will enable him to succeed at some level. You can accomplish this surprisingly fast with the help of a little transparency and direct communication.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Master cognitive map</th>
<th>An outpatient ‘learner talks’ example</th>
<th>An inpatient ‘teacher talks’ example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Beginning:</strong> faculty ask fellows for their learning goals; and help fellows identify strategies that will enhance likelihood of success in the encounter</td>
<td>You (a faculty member) ask the fellow at the beginning of an afternoon clinic session to identify a skill that the fellow wants to work on that day. The fellow says he would like to work on trying to talk about prognosis with patients. He is worried that he often feels the patient is confused by the information. After a less than a minute of discussion, you and the fellow agree that he will try asking patients if they want to talk about prognosis today. You settle on a learning goal of identifying patient concerns before giving prognostic information. The fellow agrees to pull you into the room if a patient says he wants to discuss prognosis.</td>
<td>Before a family conference, you (a faculty member) ask the fellow what she would like to learn about doing a family conference. The fellow says she would like to watch to learn ‘how to do it better’ and that she doesn’t feel that she really knows how. You suggest that an important first step is to ask about what the patient and family understand, and to observe how you do that.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Middle:</strong> the faculty sets up some type of skill practice, then gives feedback</td>
<td>You watch the fellow talk about prognosis to a patient with metastatic colon cancer. After the visit, during feedback, the fellows’ self-assessment is that he thought it went pretty well. The faculty points out that the fellow did a great job understanding the patient’s perception. You note that the patient seemed confused when the fellow talked about ‘disease-free survival’.</td>
<td>You conduct the family conference. Afterwards, you spend 2 minutes with the fellow asking her what she observed about eliciting pt/family understanding. (The skill practice is observation in this case.) The fellow is able to remember your exact question, and expresses some surprise that the question was so simple but useful.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>End:</strong> the teacher closes with one really good take-home point</td>
<td>You ask the fellow about his take home learning point. The fellow mentions the medical jargon he takes for granted. You reinforce this as an important learning for that day.</td>
<td>You ask the fellow about her take home learning point. The fellow cites the question to elicit the family’s perception. You agree and suggest that the fellow conduct that part of the next family conference.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Middle: Practice with feedback**

The Middle of the teaching session is where the bulk of the work occurs. This is the skill practice in a small group setting, or the bedside interaction in bedside teaching. The three key tasks for the teacher in this section are to: 1) help the learner gain an accurate sense of their skills; 2) help the learner see what strengths that they had in the encounter that they can build on in the future.
and 3) help the learner see how they can build on these skills to be better at the task in their next encounter.

**Closing: take-home points that resonate**

The closing of a teaching encounter can get short-shrift because we often run short on time. The work of closing is important because it reinforces the learning that has taken place. Ask the learner what she is taking away from the session (e.g. "Having gone through this, is there a take home point for you?"). By naming a specific point, it reinforces it in the learner's mind and she will be more likely to carry it forward from the session. Depending on the learner's reply, you can either simply reinforce their assessment (e.g. "That is a great point to walk away with") or you can offer an additional point you think came from the session (e.g. "You know, I also thought you made great progress with using silence during this encounter. I can see that being a useful skill for you in the future.").

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table: The key teaching skills in the master cognitive map</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Master cognitive map</th>
<th>What the teacher did to optimize learning</th>
<th>How the teacher knew she did it right</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Beginning: faculty identifies learner goals | - Created a plan to observe a substantive conversation  
- Crafted a specific goal with the fellow | - Fellow names the goal  
- Goal has observable endpoint |
| Middle: faculty sets up some type of skill practice, then gives feedback | - Collect primary observational data about skill practice  
- Ask learner for self-assessment specific to goal  
- Link feedback observation to their learner goal  
- Builds on learner strengths in feedback | - Learner evaluates self using descriptive endpoints previously negotiated  
- Learner accepts feedback as clearly relevant to own learning goal  
- Learner feels like she can do better next time she practices the task |
| End: faculty closes with one really good take-home point | - Asks for 'the most important' take home point | - Learner names a take home point that is one of the key points from this encounter |