Closing: Take-home messages that resonate
what did the learner really get?

Learning Objectives:

- Describe how to use the closing to reinforce learning
- Understand how to use closing to build agendas for future learning
- To acknowledge learner work and effort

An opportunity to reinforce learning
The closing usually represents only a small proportion of teaching. Yet the “take home message” can represent an opportunity for the fellow to reflect on skills or insights gained. When learners articulate personal take-home messages, they engage again in the learning process, and provides a step of repetition that studies show is important for retention of new learning. Finally, asking for an explicit take-home message allows the faculty to assess how the learner is incorporating new information.

When faculty explicitly value fellows’ expertise (as it accumulates), faculty support fellows in taking responsibility for their own educational needs. This adds to the process of empowerment recognized as important for lifelong learning and builds fellows’ commitments to use what they have just learned.

When do I use this skill?
This skill is used at the end of the session of skill practice sessions, whether after seeing an individual patient or working on communication skills in a group. When teaching one on one, this is likely only to take 2-3 minutes; when working with small groups try and leave 5-7 minutes for a reflective summary.
To do this skill well requires that you keeping careful notes about exactly each learner is doing and its relationship to their learning goals.

Key Skill: What do I say?

1. After finishing feedback, use an open-ended question to ask the fellow what they are taking away from session.
   - “What’s the most important thing you’ve learned from this?”
   - “Let’s take a second to reflect on what we’ve just seen. What one thing would you like to take away from today?”
   - “What did you do differently today that you want to keep doing?”
2. Reinforce learning or work that has occurred and connect this to the previous teaching you have done or their learning goals.
   - “I think we saw how difficult it is not to respond to patient emotion with some sort of reassurance.
   - “We saw in this session when emotions are really intense you need to stay with empathic responses until the patient recovers’
   - “We saw how in the past while it was sufficient to make an empathic response, this time you had to make an effort to really understand what was going on with the patient”

3. Use your own thoughts and feelings to empathize with difficult challenges.
   - “I could tell you were really working on this”
   - “This reminds me of a difficult experience that I had…”
   - “What you did that made this a valuable learning experience was…”

What does teaching success look like?
The beauty of asking for a closing take home lesson is that you get a direct read on the efficacy of the teaching you just did. After a successful session, you can expect a variety of responses: Learners will comment on both their strengths and weaknesses. They will eventually become more accurate in their observations and self-assessments of their behavior and emotions, and less likely to assume that what happened in the interview is the result of the patient’s personality. Learners will build on communication principles you have used in previous sessions, summarize the learning points that you were trying to make, commit to using a specific skill in the future, formulate goals for their next session that build on their behavior, and even expand on observations made by the facilitator.

We find this kind of teaching success to be exhilarating and rewarding—far more than when we teach in the usual I’m-the-expert-you’re-the-student model so widespread in medical education.

Pitfalls

1. Adding more take-home points to what the fellow volunteered—if they didn’t get your teaching point, you probably won’t be able to salvage the session now. Pay attention to what they did take away and think through how that happened.
2. Being too general or vague (just saying “good job”) and not focused on examples of specific behavior
3. Bringing up new topics in closing—especially issues related to fellow emotional reaction that you don’t have time to develop.

References
