

A spiral pedagogic approach to the delivery of MCA learning within a medical undergraduate curriculum

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Project method

The Plymouth University Peninsula School of Medicine delivers a comprehensive package of Mental Capacity Act learning within its spiral medical curriculum. This evidence based, distributed pedagogic approach allows scaffolding of student understanding of the MCA across core areas including mental health, dementia and learning disabilities.

In the initial 2 years of the programme MCA related concepts are explored via interactive sessions: including autonomy and paternalism, consent and doctor-patient communication. As an example, the moral compass model is used to consider the potential tension that may arise between the bioethical principles of autonomy and benevolence. The 5 principles of the MCA are considered as are the URUC criteria specified for determining capacity. These concepts are further reflected on in small group learning.

In the final 3 years these concepts are consolidated by progressively more clinically based learning experiences. These include clinically led humanities workshops that adopt scenario based exercises to embed the principles of MCA assessment including Gillick competence. The mental health and learning disability teams then provide a rich array of experiences for learners in the clinical arena which are also extended to dental students within the faculty.

Following mandatory induction sessions and information provided on the digital learning environment, students will gain first-hand experiences during clinical placements especially focused on the professional's responsibility relating to the MCA. These will be supplemented by exposure to mental health tribunals, mental health act assessments and consent to treatment procedures. Students will also be placed with the consultant liaison psychiatrist who is the nominated Mental Capacity Lead. For those students wanting an additional student selected component; they can undertake a further module in their 3rd or 4th year designed to explore in further depth, the legislation applicable to mental health practice.

Project results/evaluation

Understanding of the MCA is evaluated by both formative and summative assessment. A jewel in the crown of the undergraduate teaching at Plymouth is the 2 hour weekly clinical reasoning sessions undertaken in years 3+ 4. A senior clinician will explore understanding of student clerking/ presentations with a maximum of 3 students. During the multiple adult and old age mental health related sessions, understanding of the MCA is evaluated (formative assessment). Also, during the Observed Mental State Examination in-vivo competency assessment, students can be asked to comment on mental capacity assessment.

Project area classification

Hospital care	X	Dementia	X
GP care	X	Learning disability	X

Social care		Other mental health	X
Voluntary sector		Palliative care	X
Financial services		Advance planning, LPAs	X
Police		Commissioning	
Legal		Training	X
Community health care	X	For professionals?	X
Nursing and care home		For public and service users?	
Acute care	X	Chronic care	X
Emergency care	X		