

Assessment of Block 3, WR2 Curriculum
Drs. Colleen Croniger and Martin Snider
March 2007

As we conclude Block 3, Food to Fuel, in the WR2 Curriculum, we would like to share our assessment of the block. On the whole, we are pleased with the Block. We believe that we successfully organized a curriculum that presented the key concepts. We are also extremely impressed with the students' effort and with the amount they learned. Performance on the exam was extremely encouraging and the students' assessments of the block were positive.

We will summarize the significant accomplishments and strengths of the block and areas that can be improved by revising the presentation of the block. Finally, we will discuss larger issues that must be addressed by others.

Significant Accomplishments

Presentation of themes: The three themes in our block, gastroenterology, biochemistry, and nutrition, were each presented in cases and interactive sessions. The 19 cases and 48 interactive sessions allowed students to explore each of these themes in detail and to achieve a deep level of understanding. The twenty SEQs that we prepared were an important part of the material, because they presented material to the students in a form that required them to think in depth about important issues. These were a valuable part of our block and were an important learning tool for the students.

Integration of IQ Cases and Interactive Sessions: We strove to closely integrate the interactive sessions and the cases, making sure that the key topics in each case were presented in interactive sessions either the week before the case or during that week. Consistently positive feedback from students leads us to believe that this is a model that can be used by other blocks.

Integration of themes: We attempted to build links between the three themes in our block and the structure component (Block 7). These efforts were largely successful. Structure was represented in our cases, in our weekly SEQs and in the SSEQs in the end-of-block exam.

Education Retreat: The "mini" IQ group at the Education Retreat in February was fantastic. We were impressed with the students' performance and heartened by the depth of their understanding. This event was also useful in convincing some faculty members that the structure of the WR2 Curriculum allows students to master complex material.

Areas for Self-improvement

IQ Group Cases: We have carefully reviewed the cases with Dr. Ricanati. Cases will be modified according to the feedback from the students and facilitators. We received detailed feedback that will allow us to refine the case vignettes, the learning objectives, the goals of the cases, and the tutor guides. We anticipate reusing most of the cases, but plan to replace a few cases and change the order of the cases in the schedule. We have already outlined a few new cases that could be used next year.

Interactive sessions: All of the interactive sessions in Block 3 were lectures that were carefully scheduled to coordinate with the IQ groups. The goal was to have experts explain complex concepts and provide the students with a broad intellectual framework for their in-depth explorations in the IQ

groups. We also made sure that every presenter understood the structure of the WR2 curriculum and the relationship of the interactive sessions and the IQ groups. These lectures were well received, and the students appreciated these overviews. However, there is room for improvement. We plan to replace some of the presenters and add new presenters. In addition, some of the sessions will be converted to medium-sized groups. We anticipate that ~1/3 of the sessions will be modified in some way.

Integration of Themes: There are several issues concerning the integration of material within the block that need to be addressed. First, we began with two weeks of biochemistry and nutrition, switched our focus to gastroenterology, and then returned to biochemistry and nutrition. Although there were some advantages to this approach, the interruption made it difficult to present these topics in an integrated way. The students also commented that the nutrition topics in week 10 seemed out of place. The order of material in the blocks needs to be examined carefully to give the best integration and the best coordination with the structure component in Block 7.

Block Faculty: The number of faculty members participating in the block was limited this year by several complex issues. We believe that the block will be improved by increased commitment from the Departments of Biochemistry and Nutrition and from the Division of Gastroenterology. Some of the political and historical factors that limited more extensive faculty participation need to be addressed both by the block leadership and by senior leadership in the SOM.

Integration with Block 7: The structure component presented by Block 7 faculty was well received by the students. However, we need to achieve better integration between this material and the block 3 themes. Significant effort needs to be expended to ensure that the presentation of structure is coordinated with IQ cases in the schedule.

Integration with FCM: We need closer coordination with the FCM component to coordinate the presentation of the material in the block with the weekly themes in the block.

Clinical Immersion Week: This week needs to be better organized and needs new threads that give students more clinically relevant experiences. We believe that one of organizers of this week needs to be a gastroenterologist who can help organize experiences in this area. That person should be identified soon.

This year, Drs. Douglas Kerr and Shawn McCandless presented patients with metabolic disorders to the class during week 12. These sessions were poorly attended because the students were preoccupied with studying for the exams. These sessions should be incorporated into a nutrition and metabolism thread during the Clinical Immersion Week.

Areas for Improvement: Topics that must be addressed by others

Presentation of basic science topics: The presentation of basic science topics in a timely way remains a significant unresolved issue in the entire curriculum. There are significant areas of basic science that the students need as “vocabulary” to learn about normal physiology and pathophysiology. The students can learn some of these topics on their own. However, the students cannot be expected to grasp many key concepts in their “spare time” when their attention is focused on other material. In Block 3, there were many topics that the students needed but had not studied in detail, including the sympathetic nervous system, muscle physiology, and immunology.

Solving this problem will require creative cooperation by the curriculum's leadership and the block leaders. For example, it might be necessary to shift some time into the earlier blocks in order to introduce key basic science topics. We look forward to participating in these discussions. However, the first step in this process must be a commitment to significant changes from senior leadership.

Ecurriculum: There were significant problems with the Ecurriculum. Most significant were problems with the exam. Many students had problems taking the exam and all the faculty graders had problems. In our opinion, the current system should be replaced by a commercial courseware package that can achieve the high reliability that we require.

Student Feedback: We are very pleased that the students gave favorable ratings to our block. However, much of the feedback we receive was not detailed enough to be helpful in revising the block for next year. In order to do this, we need to have evaluations of each session from most of the class. This year, feedback was collected, but for many of the sessions, fewer than 5 students responded.

We suggest collecting feedback every two weeks, and making participation mandatory. The system should include photos of the faculty that will assist the students in recalling the presentations.

Communication: Communication between the leadership of the curriculum and the block leaders was an issue throughout the block. For example, the schedule of exams in the final week was changed but we learned about this change only indirectly. Senior leadership should strive to do a better job sharing information with block leaders.