
Book Review

Essential Skills for a Medical Teacher: An Introduction to Teaching and Learning in Medicine

Ronald M. Harden and Jennifer M. Laidlaw, with a foreword by Steven L. Kanter. Edinburgh: Churchill Livingstone–Elsevier, Ltd, 2012. ISBN-13: 978–0702045820, 274 pages, \$50.95 US.

I am pleased to be able to review the book, *Essential Skills for a Medical Teacher: An Introduction to Teaching and Learning in Medicine*, by Ronald M. Harden and Jennifer M. Laidlaw. It was a very enjoyable and informative reading adventure. The book is introduced with the basic premise that teaching is “a craft and a science,” and that through gaining a deeper understanding of their “work” all teachers can improve “from poor to good” or from “good to excellent” (page xix). With this in mind, I read the book with three sets of eyes: those of the novice or new instructor; of the clinician with some teaching experience, but little formal training in teaching; and, finally, with the eyes of an experienced instructor with training in medical education, the proficient or expert educator.

In the foreword, Dr. Steven Kanter stated that the book provides, “candid, succinct, and practical advice to an individual who is new to medical teaching.” I would agree with this wholeheartedly. The book is written using the language of medical education, but in a manner that makes it easily understandable to someone just beginning to teach within chiropractic education. For the more experienced teacher, the book will provide grounding based on Harden and Laidlaw’s many decades of experience, as well as on evidence-based educational principles. The book also could be useful as a tool for expert educators to use in our teaching of other faculty.

Part of what makes the experience of reading this book enjoyable was its excellent organizational structure. It is divided into six sections with 34 chapters. In brief, the six sections are as follows:

1. The roles and competencies of a “good” teacher, which introduces basic educational principles;
2. Learning outcomes and outcomes-based education, which addresses the issue of what should be learned or what should be taught;
3. Organizing the learning program, which addresses how to organize the training or learning program;
4. Facilitating learning, addressing teaching and learning methods, and how students or trainees can learn most effectively;
5. Assessing the progress of the learner, which clearly addresses assessing learning; and
6. Today’s teacher and tomorrow’s doctor, a brief section discussing the teacher’s role today and as anticipated looking into the future.

Thus, the authors address important issues in education about who, what, when, where, and how to teach and assess learners. The book provides a clear and consistent message in relation to key aspects of teaching and the educational process. Although the chapters are very brief, they flow well together with the chapters within each section building upon each other.

Each of the 34 chapters has a standard organizational structure. Each opens with a summary sentence and then develops over four to nine pages to provide relevant key concepts with little embellishment. The chapters are like tantalizing appetizers on each topic – excellent in quality, but leaving the reader wanting more. Two aids at the end of each chapter guide the reader in that additional study: *reflect and react* provides thought-

provoking reflection questions and/or application activities, and *exploring more* suggests readings under two listings, “if you have a few hours” and “if you have more time.” The brief chapters are very readable for busy clinician educators. There also are multiple appendices that provide additional tools and information.

The book was very easy to navigate. It has the standard table of contents and index, but in addition, it has visual cues that make it fun to use. Each page has a border along the edge that contains useful information. Thumbing from front to back, each page has the chapter name and number, while thumbing from the back to the front the border contains the section name along with the chapter number. Thus, locating information is easy and convenient in initial reading and in finding key sections for regular usage. Due to this visual appeal, I really enjoyed this as a paperback rather than an electronic book.

Returning to the three perspectives or “sets of eyes” I used in reviewing the book, the novice or new instructor should find the book very helpful in gaining basic insights into the “craft” and the “science” of teaching. However, like in all introductory level books choices had to be made, so important concepts within each arena had to be left out. As someone who teaches these topics on a daily basis I felt myself wanting to use the book as the basis for additional conversation and expansion with faculty. Thus, for the clinical teacher with more experience I think this book would be excellent to be read as a group and even better if an expert chiropractic educator is available to guide the discussion. For the experienced educator, the one caveat with this book is that a high percentage of the recommended readings are writings by Harden and colleagues, or references to works within the journal edited by Dr. Harden, *Medical Teacher*. However, I consider this to be more a reminder than a criticism – no one book can provide all of the perspectives required on the path to expert educator.

In summary I felt that, *Essential Skills for a Medical Teacher: An Introduction to Teaching and Learning in Medicine* fulfills its mission to provide an excellent introduction as well as a resource for advanced study. Harden and Laidlaw provide a common language and set of principles that should be as useful within chiropractic education as it is for education in other health professions. Read it to expand your own skills or, even better, read it with your colleagues to magnify the positive impact on chiropractic education.

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