

Feedback Tips for Junior Doctors



Reading time:
Jayson Nagpiing

Last Modified on 07/05/2024 2:26 pm AEST

When you are starting out in your profession and working under a supervisor, you will no doubt encounter a number of people keen to provide you feedback on your role. Giving good or helpful feedback is a skill that must be learned.

So, what is good feedback?

It is important to state that good feedback is not the same thing as positive feedback. Good feedback is information that is useful to you, whether it is positive or negative. It is direct, uses clear examples from your work, and includes practical suggestions for behavioural change. For example, your supervisor might say, "I liked how you played and engaged with the child before starting the examination, you put her and her parents at ease." You can easily interpret what was done well and can modify your behaviour to include this technique in further patient assessments.

How do you get feedback that is actually useful?

1. Recognise that feedback is a gift

If someone is taking the time out to give you truly meaningful advice and guidance, thank them for their time and effort. More importantly, take the steps they offer to help yourself improve and circle back to update them on your progress. Critical feedback can be hard, take it graciously and don't be defensive or explain it away. If you want to continue to receive feedback, you need to behave in a way that makes people want to give it to you.

2. Ask questions

Don't be afraid to ask clarifying questions or paraphrase their points back to them. Ask which aspects of the handover you need to improve, or what behaviours they noticed that make you seem less confident. Explore compliments by asking for examples of things you do well, and what you say or do that makes it a strength. By doing this you can capitalise on the things you do well and continue to develop these skills.

3. Don't wait for the end of term assessment

You can ask for feedback at any time. If you are working an admitting shift, tell your registrar at the start of the shift that you really want to work on formulating management plans and would like their feedback as you tell them about your patients throughout the night. Ask your boss what they thought of your history taking and if you left out anything important in the list of differentials.

4. Inform people that you want feedback

Meet up with your supervisor at the start of the term to discuss your goals for the rotation. Tell them early on that you are interested in getting feedback and list the particular areas you'd like them to focus on. Don't bail someone up in the corridor or the coffee line for some on-the-spot feedback. Set an appointment with them with at least a week's notice and schedule enough time to unpack their observations and advice. Take notes so that you have something to refer to once the meeting is done.

5. Spread it out

The more people you ask for feedback, the more you can identify common themes and goals. You don't need to start from scratch on each rotation. Carry over the advice you had from your previous supervisor and ask your new one to comment on how you are going. For example, "In my last rotation, my supervisor said I needed to work on making my physical exams more targeted. I'd like to continue to work on that this term and would appreciate your feedback as I go."

6. Self-reflection

Good insight and self-awareness means that your feedback should not contain too many surprises. Reflect often, either through journaling, discussing with friends, colleagues and mentors, or any other methods that works for you. Think about your own strengths and weaknesses and make strategic plans to drive your own growth and development. If seniors can see that you have a good understanding of yourself and your skillset, they will be able to offer more detailed and specific advice.

Feedback can be difficult to give and to receive. By understanding a little more about it, we can maximise the actionable and meaningful information we receive. Approaching these discussions with a genuine desire to build on your strengths and identify your weaknesses makes it far easier for your supervisor to provide you with useful information to help you progress.

Related articles





CAREER LEADERSHIP PROGRAM >