Finding Opportunities to Observe Teaching

1. Direct observation
   Directly observing the teacher in real-time can be challenging, but is very possible. For lecture or large group teaching, the observer can simply take any seat in the lecture hall. In small group/tutorial teaching, it is more difficult to insert oneself into the teaching space, and even more so when observing clinical teaching activities. To minimize the impact of being observed and to facilitate the logistics of observing, the following strategies may be helpful.
   - Obtain permission from learners in advance of the teaching session being observed.
   - Be clear about the purposes of the observation with learners – ensure they understand that it is the teacher that is the focus of interest and that the observer is not part of the teaching session.
   - Identify places where the observer can sit somewhat apart from the teaching activity.
   - Look for times when patient care delivery is least likely to be chaotic and rushed.
   - In addition to remaining silent, avoid making eye contact with either teacher or learners while observing.

2. Recorded observation
   When the facilities are available, recording the teaching session for later review by the observer and teacher brings additional advantages. The observer can focus on times of particular interest, and replay sections. The teacher and the observer can watch and discuss parts of the session together. The teacher is able to observe many details that cannot be noticed while in the midst of actively teaching.
   - As with direct observation, permission from learners must be obtained, and an explanation of the process provided in advance of the session.
   - Some rooms in MDCL on the Hamilton campus have the capacity to record a session – this can be arranged by contacting the Computer Services Unit in the Faculty of Health Sciences – (905) 525-9140, x. 2282.
   - Some educational programs have recording equipment available – check with yours.
   - Personal recording devices may also be used, including video recorders, cameras and phones.
   - It is important to delete teaching sessions after completing the review.

3. Online observation
   Teaching is often conducted in an on-line format, whether synchronously or asynchronously using platforms such as Avenue to Learn. This mode of teaching lends itself to observing facilitation skills, particularly through the teacher’s written comments and questions.
   - As in other observations, permission from the students and an explanation of the process is required.
   - In order to observe such teaching, the observer will need permission to join the session(s). Planning this in well in advance will lessen the chance of technical problems.
   - The observer will also need to become familiar with the platform being used.