Title: LEARNING STYLE DISTRIBUTION: A CONSISTENT RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN FACULTY AND RESIDENTS

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Introduction: A recent study showed that this training program has unknowingly perpetuated the same learning style distribution among its residents for ten years. The purpose of this investigation was twofold: (1) to determine whether other anesthesia training programs also exhibit characteristic learning style distributions and (2) to discover if participants in a recent workshop of the Society for Education in Anesthesia (SEA) were representative of teaching faculty in four known residency programs.

Methods: Learning style information was compiled from independent studies of anesthesia residency training programs at the following institutions: Mount Sinai School of Medicine (NY), University of Tennessee School of Medicine (TN), Medical College of Georgia (GA), and the Medical University of South Carolina (SC). All studies utilized the Kolb Learning Style Inventory (LSI) and tested both faculty and residents. In addition, LSI results were obtained from approximately 20% of educators attending the 1987 Spring Meeting of the SEA.

Results: Each individual program demonstrated a characteristic distribution of learning style types that was very similar for faculty and housestaff.

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Although different programs showed different learning style distributions, overall averages revealed a majority of Accommodators (36%) and Convergers (38%) and a minority of Divergers (13%) and Assimilators (13%). SEA data yielded the expected proportion of Accommodators (38%), an unprecedented number of Divergers (39%), fewer Convergers (23%), and no Assimilators (0%).

Discussion: This remarkable parallel between faculty and resident learning style distributions suggests that the LSI is sensitive to multiple cognitive and non-cognitive factors influencing the selection and training of anesthesiologists. Dominant learning types within a program probably arise from the specific work/study emphasis of that particular program (e.g., clinical service vs. research, mixed case assignment vs. subspeciality rotation). The simplest explanation for the unexpected predominance of Divergers found at the SEA meeting is that Divergers are usually excellent lecturer-consultants and identify strongly with their role as teacher.

The data from these four anesthesia residency training programs indicate that faculty can be assigned in equitable ratios to preceptors with similar learning styles. Orientation of a resident by a faculty member of the same style gives the trainee a reference source that he can utilize for counseling throughout residency. Non-dominant areas in the resident's learning behavior can be accessed with a greater sense of security when approached from a familiar perspective. The liberal education of a well-rounded anesthesiologist ideally spans all four learning modes of role behavior.

References: