

“Conversation Starters” in the Operating Theatre: An Education Tool

*This resource has been created to maximise learning opportunities at work, whether you are studying for an exam or just looking to get more out of your day. It has specifically been targeted to open and ignite educational conversations in a one-on-one environment with focus being on the **Anaesthetic Trainee-Consultant Relationship**. The principles can be broadly applied in other situations and scenarios.*

Examples are given of conversation starters during commonly occurring interactions between the anaesthetic trainee and consultant. It has been produced by Dr Anirudh (Ani) Bhardwaj (FANZCA, Sweet Dreams Anaesthesia Director) and Mr Maurice Hennessy (Retired Learning and Development Facilitator with ANZCA)

*Note: Resource is guide only.

Scenario 1 - The “Pre-Medication” phone call the night before

This may be a laborious part of the registrar's job but it can be a powerful moment to set up learning opportunities the next day. The key here is to consider how you will frame the conversation prior to making the phone call!

Tips:

- Think of one goal you would like to achieve and use this to set up the conversation. You may also wish to talk about a mutual goal between you and the consultant.
- If you struggle to think of a goal, consider an action point from your previous work day and you can try build on it.

Examples:

- I would really like to improve my skills on Airway Assessments. Can I get your feedback on this and use it to complete a Work Based Assessment or I completed a WBA recently

on Airway Assessment but I would really like some more feedback on this skill. Can we work on this together?

- This is my first time doing this Case/Surgery/Procedure. Is there a particular resource you found useful to help understand the critical steps which I can review tonight and we can go through together.
- I am currently studying for the Primary Exam. Is there a topic that you enjoyed or found challenging which we can discuss tomorrow.

Scenario 2 - The “This is your list” moment

This can be an exciting moment for the trainee but also daunting if you hadn’t thought about it in advance. The difficulty here is matching expectations between you and the supervisor.

Tips:

- Be curious about the expectations of the supervisor about how you will work together and your approach may vary depending on how frequently you have worked together.
- Utilise FAST goals (F - Frequently reviewed, A - Ambitious, S - Specific, T - Transparent) prior to starting your list and share this with your supervisor.

Examples:

- I’m still learning how different supervisors like to run their lists. How would you like us to work together today?
- Could you talk me through your usual approach for this list so I can align with your expectations?
- Are there particular aspects of the case/list you think would be advantageous for me to focus on or practise today?
- My goal for this case is to keep the patient breathing spontaneously. Can we review my approach at the end of the case.

Scenario 3 - The “Case is now on autopilot” moment

You are now in the ‘maintenance phase’ of the anaesthetic, typically in a long case. This is your chance to have one-on-one uninterrupted time with the supervisor or you may find yourself alone in the theatre.

Tips:

- Before someone leaves for a coffee break this is the ideal time to review a FAST goal. The regular use of FAST goals encourages feedback throughout the day.
- Look at ways to offer learning opportunities to other staff and vice-versa as an opportunity to learn from other staff in theatre
- Observe with intention rather than passive monitoring

Examples:

- During this time in the case what are you thinking about as we are sitting here?
- If something changed right now, what would I expect it to be and what would you do first?
- I wanted to know what strategies you use to stay vigilant in moments like this?

Scenario 4 - The “There is a lot happening right now” moment

When there is a crisis or high pressure situation occurring and all attention needs to be focused. This is not the ideal time for teaching but invaluable reflection and feedback moments can occur afterwards.

Tips:

- During these complex situations only aim to “hold onto” one thing to discuss later. This may be an action, a thought or a feeling.
- If in a non-essential role observe the actions of the whole theatre team, what roles they are allocated and how they communicate.

Examples:

- During that situation I saw that you took on the role of the Team Leader. What were the challenges of this?
- I initially felt overwhelmed during that moment and I wonder if we can discuss that response later?
- If you had to lead a debrief about that situation what would you focus on?

Scenario 5 - The “End of day and you want to just go home” moment

It's been a long list and you are on the last case waiting to go home. This is the perfect moment to start thinking of learning points to take to the next day.

Tips:

- Review if you achieved your FAST goals, or did you meet the expectation you and your supervisor set at the start of the day.
- Think of one action point that you want to improve. The members of the whole theatre team are great resources for this, especially the anaesthetic nurses and scrub scout team.

Examples:

- I think that list ran smoothly but I always want to make improvements, is there anything we should have done differently?
- How do you feel about the way we communicated our anaesthetic plans with you (*Directed to the anaesthetic nurse*) today?
- Was there anything you think we did not account for today or was overlooked?

Thank you for taking the time to utilise this education tool.

For any feedback or questions please email:

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