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The Critical Friends Group: An Innovative Way to Build Intercultural Competence Among Student and Faculty Groups

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Introduction

Few physicians involved in medical education are likely to have had formal training in teaching. One pedagogical method that can enhance relationships, thus improve teaching and learning is the Critical Friends Group (CFG). The CFG is a collegial support team that offers improved understanding of others. Unconditional high regard for team members frames the interactions in the CFG. These teams could be used to reduce bias and enhance intercultural competence among student CFGs and faculty CFGs.

Session Objectives

1. To introduce the Critical Friends Group as a collegial support team.
2. To examine the Critical Friends Group as a vehicle to reduce bias and enhance intercultural competence among faculty and student Critical Friends Groups.

Session Content

Educators, in particular, medical educators have unique opportunities to model and promote intercultural competence. They are more credible when there is congruence between the values they espouse and their behavior. This proposed presentation acknowledges that educators and their students could benefit from the interaction and support of a Critical Friends Group. Allport's Contact Theory identifies four conditions that are associated with bias reduction. These are:

- Opportunities to gain reciprocal knowledge,
- Equal status between the groups in the situation,
- Work or play to achieve common goals, and
- Authority sanction for the contact

A CFG can build a sense of community around these conditions that promote the development of positive interpersonal communication. As Critical Friends experience the conditions associated with bias reduction, they grow. As medical educators experience reduction in their biases, they are better prepared to assist their students in becoming free of the paralyzing affects of unchallenged bias.

Audience

Medical educators, students, community activists, as well as the religious and business community could benefit from this interactive session.