Tips for TOP Observers

1. Preparation in advance of observation
   - Contact mentee (instructor) prior to their teaching session:
     - Introduce yourself, confirm scheduled day/time for observation.
     - Review goals of TOP program – dialogue about teaching, confidential, goal is to offer opportunities for improvement.
     - Ask how you can best help your mentee, have mentee set focus for observation (structure, pacing, handing questions, use of A/V materials, etc).
     - Learn context of the teaching encounter (first encounter with learners or is this part of a series of encounters, what is the setting – classroom vs. clinic, etc)
     - If small group or clinical session, talk to the mentee about letting the learners/patients know you will be there and explain the purpose of your presence (observing the teacher, not the learners).
     - Obtain copies of your mentee’s slides or teaching materials, if any.
     - Arrange a time for the feedback session (~30 min). Its best to do this as soon as possible, within a couple days, to get the biggest benefit. (Its useful to allow time for reflection and to formulate your feedback rather than meeting immediately after.)
   - Review content and teaching materials (slides/small group material etc).
   - Print and review observation form for the specific type of teaching.

2. Observation
   - Use observation form to take notes; be as specific as possible, include examples so you can offer specific suggestions.
   - Separate yourself from clinical issues and discussions, and avoid interjections. Remain focused on learning environment and teaching effectiveness.
   - Consolidate your thoughts into a few main points (three max) that will be most beneficial for your mentee and their learners.

3. Feedback principles (See also “Elements of Effective Feedback”)
   - Reiterate that your conversation is confidential. The goal is to foster a culture where it is normal and welcomed to have teachers provide each other with feedback.
   - Begin by asking mentee to self-assess their teaching – both strengths and areas for improvement.
   - Provide specific feedback, focusing on areas requested by mentee.
   - Balance discussion of strengths and weaknesses – begin and end with strengths.
   - Limit feedback to 3 main points.
   - Refer to specific examples you observed.
   - Provide specific suggestions for improvement.
   - Leave time for mentee to respond and ask clarifying questions.
   - Give copy of observation form with feedback.
Elements of Effective Feedback

A. Principles of Giving Good Feedback
   - Well timed and expected
   - Safe and mutually supportive environment
   - Understandable - keep it clear and simple
   - Comment on strengths before weaknesses
   - First-hand data, based on direct observation
   - Focused – address only 2-3 issues, limit to behaviors that are remediable
   - Channeled – directed toward behavior to be corrected, not the person
   - Specific and concrete – use specific examples, avoid generalizations
   - Descriptive non-evaluative language (i.e. no judgement)
   - Informative – explain why the behavior is a problem, provide suggestions for improvement

B. Principles of Receiving Feedback
   - Listen with an open mind; Avoid interrupting or defending a behavior
   - Ask clarifying questions
   - Relate feedback back to your own goals
   - Ask for specific suggestions
   - Take time before responding

References: