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To cite this article: Michail Christodoulou, Stefanos Kachrilas, Ahmed Dina, Andreas Bourdoumis, Junaid Masood, Noor Buchholz & Athanasios Papatsoris (2014) How to conduct a successful workshop: The trainees' perspective, Arab Journal of Urology, 12:1, 12-14, DOI: [10.1016/j.aju.2013.08.004](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.aju.2013.08.004)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.aju.2013.08.004>



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Published online: 05 Apr 2019.



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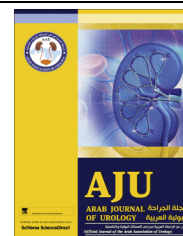
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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

# How to conduct a successful workshop: The trainees' perspective



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Received 13 July 2013, Received in revised form 6 August 2013, Accepted 11 August 2013

Available online 12 September 2013

## KEYWORDS

Workshop;  
Simulators;  
Surgical skills;  
Trainees;  
Virtual reality

**Abstract Objectives:** To define the success of a medical workshop from the trainees' perspective, where a medical workshop is a scientific event with the aim of presenting updated knowledge and to teach medical skills to the participants. In surgical specialties, it contributes to the development and maintenance of surgical skills.

**Methods:** Medline was searched for the previous 4 months to identify articles with combinations of the keywords 'workshops', 'training', 'simulators', and 'virtual reality'. Further articles were obtained by manually searching the reference lists of identified papers. We also obtained information and critical aspects of view from other trainees.

**Results:** Based on 30 articles from the Medline search, and mostly from the trainees' perspective, we present the basic characteristics of a successful workshop. The objective of the workshop, appropriate faculty members and presenters, highly motivated participants, the use of simulators and evaluation sheets, the venue and the registration fees all have a major role in the success of a workshop.

**Conclusions:** A successful workshop is that from which trainees have grasped most of the knowledge and skills imparted to them, with a positive progression

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Peer review under responsibility of Arab Association of Urology.



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reflected on their learning curve. Workshops are a current necessity and all efforts should be made to achieve the desired result from the trainees' perspective.

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## Introduction

A medical workshop has been defined as an intensive educational programme for a relatively small group of doctors from a particular specialty [1]. It is a scientific event with the objective of presenting updated knowledge and to teach medical skills to the participants. For instance, in surgical specialties it contributes to the development and maintenance of surgical skills, and it is used to certify surgeons as technically competent. In the past, surgical trainees mastered their techniques by training in the operating theatre on patients. However, the potential to learn in the operating room has become increasingly limited because of the legislation that limits the hours of work per week, the medico-legal and federal regulations, and the pressure from the health service managers to undertake as many operations as possible [2]. In addition, increased awareness of the issue of medical malpractice has reduced the previous tolerance for training inexperienced surgeons in the operating room. Therefore, a surgical workshop in which trainees could improve their learning and be trained in a risk-free environment, while the trainer monitors the whole educational process, can play a major role in supplementing the training of surgeons.

## Key roles

The success of a workshop should be defined from the perspective of the participants or trainees. The trainees expect that a workshop should have a clear and defined objective. Also, they expect that the organizers should designate the appropriate faculty members and discuss with them the relevant topics of the workshop. Efficient faculty members are needed to run a successful workshop. They should be aware that they are responsible for covering the participants' expectations. Moreover, the faculty members should keep the workshop sessions on time. The organizing office of the workshop should make arrangements for transportation and hotel bookings of the participants, and in general communicate with them regularly and efficiently.

The chairman of the workshop should choose the right venue, which must be easily accessible for the trainees. Also, the venue should be comfortable and the chairs should be arranged for participants to easily see and hear. The lights should be adequate and there should be appropriate heating and/or air conditioning. Usually, audio-visual equipment or sound systems are

necessary, and thus a relevant technician should be on site on the day of the event.

In the era of economic crisis it is difficult to afford the cost of several workshops. The organizers should find sponsors for the workshop, to ensure low registration fees, as one of the major objectives of a workshop is not to gain profit but to teach the trainees.

## Trainees and faculty

Ensuring highly motivated trainees is one of the most important steps in organizing a successful workshop. A small group of 10 participants seems to be the reasonable size. Usually 10 is enough to have a diversity of perspectives and quality discussions, and small enough to have a more intimate experience and develop real, lasting relationships and bonds between the trainer and trainees, which leads to better educational results.

The presenters should think of themselves as potentially being one of the participants. The trainees expect the faculty members to make a complex topic understandable to them, rather than to give in-depth coverage of their expertise. This should not preclude that the participants might want detailed references for further study. The information provided by the presenters should be through annotated references, links to websites and detailed charts and educational graphs. Presenters should know the topic, be clear, insightful, energetic, succinct and respectful. They have to be approachable and ask participants what they want. Currently it is very popular during the workshops to organize a trainer-trainees meeting so that the trainees can discuss several medical issues with the experts.

Participants should be fluent in the language of the workshop, or interpreters should be present. If presentations are being translated, the presenter should spend some time with the interpreter before the presentation and provide their notes at least 1 day before, so that the interpreter will be able to prepare the translations. In general, it is useful to speak slowly and clearly to facilitate more accurate translations.

The workshop should be scheduled in the morning and late afternoon hours. Most of the trainees are more energetic and concentrated at these times of day. Beverages and food should be provided on site, to enable participants to focus and to keep them from being distracted by hunger or thirst. Meal times are also a valuable part of a workshop and it is usually best to have group meals between faculty members and participants.

## Evaluation

Individual sessions should be evaluated daily, to obtain feedback from the participants as soon as possible after the presentations and discussions. This process can improve the efficacy of a workshop while it is taking place, and enable relevant changes and corrections. A final evaluation of the entire workshop should take place on the last day. Standard graded assessment sheets should be used, that calculate the evaluation score per session and for each presenter. Also the organization, venue and audio-visual equipment should be evaluated. This is one of the ways to grade each workshop and improve the next one.

## Simulators in workshops

There is considerable interest in the implementation of simulators in workshops [3]. Simulators offer various important advantages over both theoretical teaching and live processes in patients. It has been reported that simulators shorten the relevant learning curves in various techniques. Also, learning on simulators allows participants to practice and learn from their mistakes without harming the patients.

Surgical simulators are in various stages of development and validation. To keep in pace with the current changes in healthcare system training and demand, interactive learning and the integrated use of valid and reliable realistic advanced tools, such as virtual reality simulators, are necessary [4]. This is particularly significant in the modern era of minimally invasive surgery, where laparoscopic procedures and robotic surgery are gaining greater popularity. The virtual reality simulators provide a novel training model for improving surgical skills in various surgical fields [5–9]. Apart from training in basic operative skills, a virtual reality simulator can also simulate a variety of surgical scenarios to improve the overall skills of dealing with challenging cases. Studies show a statistically significant improvement in the operative time and a decrease in the rate of risks and complications [10].

Ideally, each trainee should have his or her personal instructor, and therefore workshops should be conducted for a relatively small group of people. The limited time, different progress rate between the participants, anxiety and stress of the trainees while waiting their turn to be trained, should be avoided. The organizers are encouraged to conduct workshops with a ratio between instructors and participants of 1:1, whenever possible.

## Conclusions

A workshop is aimed at trainees, and hence its success should be defined from the trainees' perspective. In this

article we present our thoughts and wishes about workshops, with much of the information obtained by discussion with other trainees. A successful workshop is that from which trainees have grasped most of the knowledge and skills imparted to them. There should be an appropriate selection of the following factors to guarantee the conduct of a successful workshop:

- objective of the workshop;
- faculty members;
- presenters;
- participants;
- the venue of the workshop;
- low registration fees;
- the use of simulators;
- evaluation sheets.

In conclusion, workshops are a current necessity and all the efforts should be made to achieve the desired result from the trainees' perspective.

## Conflict of interest

None.

## Source of funding

None.

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