Best practices in e-learning for clinical education and training: A theoretical framework

This project was funded by the ClinEdQ Research and Publication Initiative to provide a theoretical framework for the theory and practice of e- and blended learning for use in clinical education and to provide guiding principles for the development of e-learning and blended learning strategies. The summary below outlines the key outcome of the project.

Summary
The report contains guiding principles and strategies to guide the development of e- and blended learning in the area of clinical education.

Guiding principles:
1. Blended learning strategies have application for distance education as well as traditionally-delivered education in classrooms.
2. Blended learning strategies should be employed where possible, for allied health undergraduate, postgraduate and continuing professional development courses, as the learning outcomes are considered better than from traditional teaching and learning strategies.
3. There is no ‘one size fits all’ approach to optimising the learning outcomes of allied health students, no matter what the learning environment. Educators should consider applying a range of different teaching and learning strategies that will address the learning needs of all students in their classes, irrespective of the learning environment.
4. For any allied health student in any class, there should be an emphasis on active learning which employs concrete as well as abstract thinking.
5. How students learn best when education is consumed at a distance from traditional classrooms, should be carefully considered before distance education courses are designed and implemented.
6. Active learning strategies should be engaged where possible for all allied health students (irrespective of the learning environment), using strategies such as interactive problem-solving, case demonstrations and scenarios, quizzes with immediate feedback, problem-based learning in groups.

Strategies:
Prior to commencing the development of e-learning training packages an adequate understanding of the nature of the content to be taught is vital.

E-learning appears to have an important role in:

- Teaching general knowledge, and theoretical background information.
- Allowing active reflection of new training material, i.e. integrating new material with old knowledge.
- Providing updates on new advances in the discipline.

Areas of concern about using an e-learning medium include educators’ capacity to use it to:
- teach interpersonal skills, and
- teach and assess high level clinical skills, particularly where competency needs to be demonstrated.

E-Learning should be supported by the use of face-to-face workshops to allow participants the opportunity to develop higher cognitive clinical reasoning skills and display interpersonal skills. This face to face experience is also important to accommodate the range of learning styles.

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