



Office of Continuing Medical Education
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What is Adult Learning Theory?

Adult learning theory, also known as “andragogy,” asserts that adults have unique qualities that make them different from younger learners. Adults learn best when they learn by doing and experiencing. Their focus is on being able to apply new information, not just memorize it. Adult learners can be more demanding than their counterparts, as they are goal-driven and need to know what their education will do to help them meet their goals. Adult learning theory is based on four key principles and five key assumptions.

Key Principles of Adult Learning 1. Involvement in Learning 2. Accessing Past Experiences: Adults possess a wealth of experiences to help them understand new information. 3. Problem Solving: Adults want to solve problems and apply reasoning. 4. Immediacy: Adults want to be able to apply information immediately.

Key Assumptions of Adult Learning 1. Self-concept: Adult independence and self-directed. 2. Adults have prior experience from which they draw knowledge. 3. Readiness to Learn. 4. Goal-Oriented 5. Motivation to Learn: Adults are motivated to learn, wanting to improve themselves rather than learn because of others.

How Should I Design Instruction for Adults?

To increase the relevance and effectiveness of grand rounds:

1. **Perform a constituent-wide needs assessment** to identify the educational needs of your audience and guide the choice of grand round topics. Don't leave selection entirely to presenters, who may choose topics that are convenient but not of great interest/value to your audience.
2. **Develop a curriculum** that includes not only subspecialty topics but also such diverse subjects as patient safety, quality improvement, ethics, professionalism, and education.
3. **Select presenters based on their ability to engage an audience** not solely on their level of expertise.
4. **Involve residents** in case presentation and analysis and provide training to residents in leading case-based presentations.
5. **Give presenters tips on maximizing presentation effectiveness.**
 - a. Vary instructional formats within a given session with a mix of interactive and didactic education that stimulates learners.
 - b. Don't run over time, stop early, leaving time for discussion and to complete evaluations.

CME Office collects evaluations and needs assessments, if you would like a copy from a specific event, contact the CME Office at cmeoffice@marshall.edu