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University of Huddersfield – Customer Service Skills and Communication Event.

In March 2014 a new initiative was undertaken at the University of Huddersfield to guide first year podiatry students on the importance of developing their customer service and communication skills when managing patients within podiatric practice.

The event involved collaboration between academic staff and third year podiatry student mentors (or 'buddies' as we refer to them at Huddersfield). Innovative role play, interactive games and peer coaching strategies were employed by the buddies as a teaching method to communicate the importance of customer service and communication skills. The buddies conveyed the message using a light hearted, reassuring approach.

The event was organised by Veronica Newton, Senior Lecturer in Podiatry with active participation and support of the buddies and College of Podiatry Students' Association (CPSA) rep, namely;

James Forrest (CPSA Rep), Miranda Tuxworth, Nafisa Zaman, Elizabeth Connor, Jenny Laney, Karen Sagar, Simon Jenson, Laura Kirk, Lesley Hynd and Daniel Malone.

The event was broken down into two student led role plays and two interactive games.

Interactive Game 1, *Walk this way*, Fig 1. Laura, Daniel and Simon gave random instructions to the students, some of which made sense and others were deliberately misleading. The purpose of this exercise was to illustrate the importance of communicating using a clear and consistent approach.

Interactive Game 2, *Listen carefully*, Fig 2. Elizabeth, Karen and Lesley used the "whispering game" to communicate a list of unrelated items via a group of students, with the aim of the list reaching the start without any errors. The purpose of this exercise was to illustrate the importance of listening and communicating information and when appropriate, to ask supplementary questions to confirm information.

Role Play, Game 3, *Negotiation skills*, Fig 3. Miranda and James acted out a scene in a restaurant portraying a customer and waiter. The customer was briefed to ask for something which was not available. The waiter was briefed to avoid saying "no". The purpose of this role play was observational to help students think creatively about communication skills, without saying "no".

Role Play, Game 4, *Explain Yourself*, Fig 4. Nafisa and Jenny facilitated first year students measuring their colleagues up for winter attire, and fitting gloves hats and socks both with and without explanation. The purpose of this role play was observational to show students the value of explaining to customers what you are doing and increase student awareness of how patients as customers have a fear of the unknown.

Overall the event was highly enjoyable, it was well received by the first year students and the buddies commented on how much they enjoyed the opportunity to be involved.

The role play events were an engaging and fun experience and achieved the objective of highlighting the significance of communication and customer service to first year students. In addition it emerged that third year students felt it was important to continuously build upon these skills for podiatric healthcare practice.

Fig 1 Walk this way.



Fig 2 Listen Carefully.



Fig 3 Negotiation skills.



Fig 4 Explain yourself.

