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# The American Journal of Surgery

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## Commentary

### Letter to editor: Surgery clerkship offers greater entrustment of medical students with supervised procedures than other clerkships



We believe that the most important part of a surgical clerkship – and indeed any clerkship – is developing a solid rapport with the healthcare team. In our experience, rapport with the team during a surgical clerkship can be best built in the operating theatre. Medical students would do well to introduce themselves appropriately to the surgical team and attend the team briefing at the start of every operating list. In particular, a plan should be discussed with the lead surgeon beforehand of the degree of involvement during the theatre list (the following protocol can also be mapped to work that is done in ward rounds and outpatient clinics). The medical student first observes an operation. Then, in the second operation, the student scrubs in to assist in minor skills such as suctioning and retracting. In the following operation, the student can then assist with suturing and other basic aspects of the operation. This graded approach allows both the medical student and the lead surgeon to build trust and rapport for the student to perform these skills.

Moreover, simulation should be incorporated in the medical school's curriculum before the start of the clerkship. Simulation has been shown to be an effective tool in providing medical students with the confidence they need to improve their learning and reaction in real scenarios.<sup>2</sup> For example, simulation can be incorporated at the start of a surgical clerkship in an observed environment in order to expose the medical student to the basic skills used in operating theatres and surgical wards. An intensive workshop that lasts a few hours can provide an introduction to, for example, suturing and NG tube insertions and removals. Practicing these skills on a mannequin or model first will allow the student to gain confidence in seizing the opportunity to perform it on a real patient on the wards or in theatres.

We appreciate the difficulty that some doctors may have in trusting students to perform certain procedures, but we emphasise that this is important in order to allow the student to gain the necessary skills they need to perform as part of their medical

education. Simulation is an important part of this process in boosting the student's confidence of performing practical skills. For surgical clerkships in particular, rapport with the surgical team can be developed throughout the course of several operations. The simple closure of a wound can ignite a passion of surgery in a student more than any lecture or video ever could.

#### Declaration of competing interest

All authors declare no conflict of interest.

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