

# The Use of Motivational Interviewing in the Support of Underperforming Students



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# Introduction

Newcastle University

Faculty of Medical Sciences

School of Biomedical Sciences

Offer 11 named BSc including Biomedical Sciences,  
Biochemistry, Physiological Sciences

Offer MSci in Biomedical Sciences

Core first three semesters for all programmes except BSc  
Biomedical Sciences with Management

# Introduction

## Student Numbers

240 – 250 home Students

10 – 20 international Students

Majority of students (60%) apply for BSc Biomedical Sciences

Standard offer ABB (except MSci and BMS and Management AAB)

Students graduating with first or upper second:-

2006-2007 66%

2007-2008 71%

# Introduction

School of Biomedical Sciences Structure

Established 2002

Core staff dedicated to supporting degree programmes. 7 academics (1 Prof, 3 SL, 2L, 1 TF) and eight office staff (administrator and 7 office staff) four laboratory technicians.

Phase Advisors back up personal tutor system

- See all 1<sup>st</sup> year and 2<sup>nd</sup> year semester 1 students who miss any practical or seminar sessions and all students that fail an in course examination or end of module examination

# Introduction

Phase Advisors: Meetings 2006-08

Missed Sessions: - 110

Failed Examination – In course 63

End of module (January) 96

Phase 1 advisor system has halved stage 1 students failing or withdrawing.

Some evidence of shift from 3<sup>rd</sup> and 2.2 marks bands to 2.1 and 1<sup>st</sup> class bands in stage 2.

Small number of students not engaged with course

# Motivational Interviewing

## Motivational Interviewing

MI has its roots in work with alcoholics, drug users etc.

It is a way of helping people recognise and do things about their present or potential problems.

Particularly useful with people who are reluctant to change and/or ambivalent about changing

- They want to change and do not want to change at the same time.

# Motivational Interviewing

MI is a technique where the responsibility for change is left with the individual

- The motivation for change is elicited from the student and not imposed by coercion, persuasion, constructive confrontation, threatened loss of place on course etc.

Basis is to explore with a student

- 1) Positive aspects (as they see them off the problematic behaviour)
- 2) Empathetic and Reflective Listening
- 3) Avoiding Argument
- 4) Building self-efficacy
- 5) Framing questions calculated to evoke change talk
- 6) Self motivational statements

# General Principles of MI

1. Express Empathy – through self-reflective listening. Note that ambivalence (reluctance to give up a problem behaviour) is normal.
2. Support Self-Efficacy – The student is responsible for choosing and carrying out personal change)
3. Avoid Argument – arguments are counterproductive, defending breeds defensiveness
4. Develop Discrepancy – Awareness of a behaviours consequences is important, a discrepancy between present behaviour and important goals will motivate change.



# Motivational Interviewing Training

2 day workshop arranged by staff development unit at Newcastle University in April 2007.

Attended by 3 academic staff from school of Biomedical Sciences and 12 staff from a range of support services across the university

# MI School of Biomedical Sciences

6 students identified for extensive MI by phase advisors

1 hour initial interview, followed by 30 minute - 1 hour session the following week, then 30 minute sessions for next 2 weeks. Then 30 minute session every 2-3 weeks thereafter as required by student.

2 First year students JA, DV

4 Second year students GN, KY, GF and HW

4 other students offered short term MI sessions

30 – 60 minute initial session followed by 30 minute session every 2-3 weeks thereafter.

# Case Studies MI

DV:- 1<sup>st</sup> year student, picked up due to poor attendance semester 2 and failing in course assessment.

Failed 60/120 credits first year modules

Failed all re-sit examinations

Allowed to re-take modules as internal student as third and final attempt

Passed all examinations at 3<sup>rd</sup> Attempt with average 53% in examinations.

# Case Studies MI

JA:- 1<sup>st</sup> year student, picked up due to very poor attendance semester 2. Had been seen extensively by first year phase advisor.

Failed all 100/120 credits first year modules

Passed failed 100 credits after re-sit examinations

Stage 2

Failed 60/60 Credits Semester 1 (Passed re-sits)

Passed 60/60 Credits semester 2 (average 51%)

# Case Studies MI

GN :- 2<sup>nd</sup> year student, picked up due to very poor attendance semester 1 and 2 and failing examinations. Had been seen extensively by phase advisor.

Had passed 1<sup>st</sup> year modules with average of 49%

Stage 2

Passed 30/120 Credits second (after re-sits)

Had 3<sup>rd</sup> attempt at 90 credits as a mixed internal/external student. Failed 50 credits.

# Case Studies MI

KY :- 2<sup>nd</sup> year student, picked up due to very poor attendance semester 1 and 2 and failing examinations. Had been seen extensively by phase advisor.

Had passed 1<sup>st</sup> year modules (after 80 credits re-sits) with average of 42%

Stage 2

Passed 20/120 Credits second year (after re-sits)

Had 3<sup>rd</sup> attempt at 40 credits semester 1 as an internal candidate. Failed 40 credits – Advised to withdraw after semester 1.

# Conclusions

From the experience at Newcastle over the last year there is mixed evidence as to the benefit of MI.

The authors feel that this technique is a very useful tool at times and we would suggest that at least all senior tutors are given some training in MI to enable effective support of all students.

We are unsure as to the best group to target for MI (failing students/borderline 3<sup>rd</sup>-2:2 students/students with a sharp decline in marks from semester 1 – 2).

We will explore the possibility of using MI in short sharp bursts to a greater number of students over the next year.