

## How can we support medical students to navigate uncertainty in their learning environments?

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### Background:

Clinical uncertainty can be defined as ‘the dynamic subjective perception of not knowing what to think, feel, or do’.<sup>1</sup> How medical students respond to uncertainty can influence their wellbeing, attitudes towards patients, and career choices. Our research has shown that medical students’ uncertainties are linked to doubts about capabilities, lack of role clarity, and difficulties navigating learning environments. We found that students’ confidence to respond to uncertainty did not improve as they progressed through medical school, suggesting a missed opportunity to help students’ learn to manage clinical uncertainty. To address these findings, we utilised Social Cognitive Theory to develop a teaching tool to support medical students to respond to uncertainty. The tool consists of a series of four prompts which doctors can use to reveal their own uncertainties, model a constructive response to uncertainty, and then invite medical students to share their uncertainties. This tool allows students to see uncertainty as a normal part of clinical practice and develop constructive responses in a supportive environment. A feasibility study is being conducted with surgeons and general practitioners who teach fourth year medical students.

### Objectives:

Participants will be familiarised with our teaching tool to support medical students navigate uncertainty. Participants will discuss how this tool might be used in their context, possible challenges that might be encountered when implementing this approach, and possible outcomes.

### Questions for exploration and discussion:

- What approaches have you used to teach health care professional students about uncertainty?
- What challenges have you faced implementing educational interventions in clinical environments?
- How might we sustain and improve educational innovations at times of uncertainty and intense pressure for clinical educators?

### Reference:

1. Lee, C, Hall, K, Anakin, M, Pinnock, R. Towards a new understanding of uncertainty in medical education. *J Eval Clin Pract.* 2020; 1–11. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jep.13503>