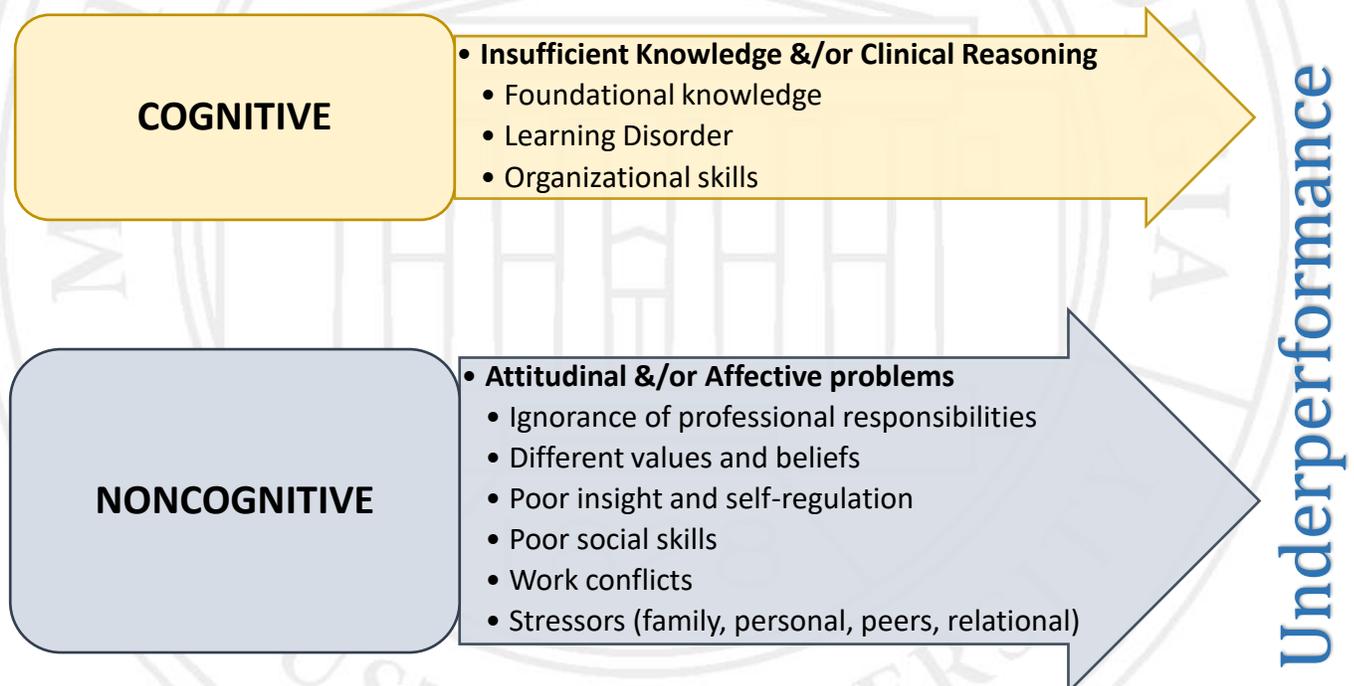## Identifying and Assisting Struggling Learners

BACKGROUND

Identifying what kind of a problem a learner is having is an important first step to assisting them in addressing or minimizing the problem. Having a framework to consider various sources of the problem aids in remediation as well reduces natural tendency to attribute problems to the person or his/her character rather than circumstances or other factors.

SUGGESTIONS

Basic Approach to Identifying a Learner's Problem

COGNITIVE

- **Insufficient Knowledge &/or Clinical Reasoning**
  - Foundational knowledge
  - Learning Disorder
  - Organizational skills

NONCOGNITIVE

- **Attitudinal &/or Affective problems**
  - Ignorance of professional responsibilities
  - Different values and beliefs
  - Poor insight and self-regulation
  - Poor social skills
  - Work conflicts
  - Stressors (family, personal, peers, relational)

Underperformance

Boileau , 2017

More Differentiated Approach to Identifying a Learner's Problem

Knowledge	Attitudes	Skills
Gaps in knowledge of basic or clinical sciences	Difficulties with motivation, insight, self-assessment, doctor-patient relations, professionalism	Difficulties with interpreting information, interpersonal skills, technical skills, clinical judgment, or organization of work.

Underperformance

Teacher	Learner	System
Teachers' perceptions, expectations or feelings; personal experiences or stresses; colleagues' perceptions, expectations or stresses.	Relevant life history or personal problems, including acute life stresses, learning disabilities, psychiatric illness, or substance abuse; learner expectations and assumptions; learner reactions to identified problems.	Unclear standards or responsibilities; overwhelming workload; inconsistent teaching or supervision; lack of ongoing feedback or performance appraisal

Steinert, 2013

Steps in Assisting

1)   Observe behaviors (and documenting as appropriate) that are problematic or likely to lead to problems later.

2)   Inquire with learner about their perception of his/her behavior(s) to ascertain learner's insight and attributions toward "problem" and their existing efforts (if any) to address.

3)   Employ Ask/Tell/Ask Feedback model or similar approach to promote learner's ownership of the problem as well as their self-directed learning to address.

4)   Establish plan to address using S.M.A.R.T. goals (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, time-based) and timeline. (or refer to program director)

WANT MORE?

Feedback Models in the Clinical Teaching Setting (MCG Medical Educator Minute)

Struggling Medical Learners: A Competency-Based Approach to Improving Performance (AAMC MedEdPORTAL module)

REFERENCES

Steinert Y. The "problem" learner: whose problem is it? AMEE Guide No. 76. Med Teach. 2013;35:e1035-45.

Boileau E, St-Onge C, Audétat MC. Is there a way for clinical teachers to assist struggling learners? A synthetic review of the literature. Adv Med Educ Pract. 2017;8:89-97.