

## Effective Strategies for Responding to Questions during Rounds



If you feel something similar to stage fright when asked a question in front of a team of students and can't think properly, please realize you are not alone. However, try not to let the presence of others affect your ability to answer the attending's questions. Remind yourself that your team members want you to succeed.

To increase your chances of answering questions correctly, consider preparing the evening before rounds by anticipating what type of questions you may be asked. Questions usually fall into one of the following two categories:

- *Clarifying Questions:* For example, "How did he describe his pain?" or "How has the X changed from her last visit to her primary care physician?" To prepare, be sure to perform a thorough history and physical exam, organize the data, and have it readily available.
- *Probing Questions:* For example, "What are the physical exam findings of X?" or "What does Y indicate to you?" To prepare, make sure you are knowledgeable about your patient's medical problems, which means you may need to supplement your studies with specific texts or recent journal articles.
- Then, practice answering questions either by yourself or with a colleague.
- When answering questions, strive to answer confidently (realizing that you will not have the answer to every question) by *avoiding* the following:
  - Phrasing your response in the form of a question (e.g., "Aren't alcohol and gallstones two major causes?")
  - Prefacing a response with "I think" (e.g., "I think alcohol and gallstones are the two major causes.")
  - Diminishing the strength of your response by using words such as "I may be wrong, but..." or "I'm not sure but ..."

Maximize your chances of answering correctly by utilizing resources that will give you a deeper level of understanding. Ask residents or your Clerkship Director for recommendations. While you should be prepared to answer questions about the different aspects of a patient's diagnosis, also read about the patient's other medical problems as well.

If you are asked a question and you do not know the correct answer, have the confidence to say, "I don't know, but I'll find out." Your attending will not expect you to know everything and part of being a good physician is recognizing limitations to your knowledge and being able to say, "I don't know."

Understand that similar questions will come up again later in your rotation. To prepare, after rounds, spend some time making a list of the questions that were asked and make sure you know the answers to each question. If you don't, prioritize these topics to review or research.

Desai, S. P. & Katta, R. (2007). *250 of the biggest mistakes 3<sup>rd</sup> year medical students make and how to avoid them*. Houston, TX: MD2B