Questions to Facilitate Reflection and Feedback

We question students for many and varied reasons, it may be to
i) Find out what student knows (test basic knowledge)
ii) Get the student to self-reflect and assess
iii) Stimulate information retrieval
iv) Promote the use of higher order thinking and problem solving skills (analysis, synthesis, evaluation).

Not only does a good teacher avoid answering questions but he or she also questions answers. The most important point to remember is to actively engage the student in the learning process. If you answer for the learner or continually explain without testing knowledge or problem solving skills you will never be sure of the student’s ability or understanding of concepts. Effective questioning takes time and consideration by the educator so as to correctly challenge the student. Below are some general tips on effective questioning:

When you ask a question:
– Restrict closed questions to test questions (largely knowledge areas)
– Try not to answer it yourself!
– Count to 5-10 silently before moving on
– Only ask one question at a time
– Ensure there is little/no risk of embarrassment if the student responds incorrectly
– Use predominantly open questions as stimulates attention & higher order thinking (problem solving skills)
– Be aware of your non verbals as the student will pick up on
– Avoid Why? This can come across as threatening and inhibit thinking and can be highly ambiguous. Instead rephrase the question.
– If the student answers poorly/incorrectly try not to answer it for them but follow it up with another open question or use questions that test basic knowledge in the area.
– When a student asks you a question, rather than giving the answer follow it with a counter question as this stimulates their prior learning i.e. Student – why has this patient an RIG rather than a PEG tube?, Educator – Good question. Firstly what can you remember are the contraindications to PEG feeding?

Generally we are all able to start questioning but can find it difficult when we don’t get the desired response. Below are some questions you might find useful in challenging situations or where the student is finding it difficult to reflect and self-assess and therefore needs more guidance from you.

1. General Questions:
   – What were your main challenges in that situation?
   – What action points from the last situation did you try to include this time? Did it have an impact?
   – What were the key issues for this consultation?
   – How did you address the key issues in the consultation?
   – From the patients engagement and questions asked what did you ascertain was their understanding of the issue/advice you gave/priority of the issue?
   – What were your goals and what do you think were the patients? Did they align?
2. When trying to elicit feelings about a situation (anxious/nervous/uncomfortable), try:
   - How did you feel at the start of the consultation?
   - What made you feel like that?
   - Are there any things you could do next time that would prevent you from feeling like that?

3. Useful when you want the student to pin point parts of the interview and assess individually:
   - Let’s think through the consultation from the start; can you describe how it began/the process of diet history taking/how you involved the client
   - Think about what the patient said; what did she want to get out of the consultation?/What issues did she tell you about?/What was her lifestyle like?
   - That’s an important issue you just highlighted, how did you deal with that in the consult?
   - Let’s now think about what your aims were in the consultation, what were you trying to achieve?/What were your goals?

4. Leading questions: useful when student finding it difficult to self-assess and reflect, however if over used they lose impact as the student knows you are directing them so they stop self-reflecting:
   - Could you have engaged the client any more in the interview/goal setting?
   - Had you made yourself any notes beforehand?
   - Was it practical for the patient to implement that advice?
   - How do you feel about the clinical advice you gave?
   - What do you think the patient understood from the information you gave her?
   - How did you check the patient’s level of understanding of the advice/intervention?
   - Did the client ask any questions of you?/How did you answer the clients questions?

5. Making an action plan for the next encounter.
   - Let’s think back now on what issues the patient raised and you said you did not address it. How do you think you would tackle it if it happened in the future
   - If you wanted to give a patient more information on that topic what sort of things would you discuss?
   - You felt pressurised about getting all the information in, in the time allowed; how could you have prioritised the information your give?
   - How do you think you could help yourself the next time to feel more in control?
   - What could you do next time to make it easier for yourself?
   - So let’s think about what you would like to do before you see another patient