



**The Guy's, King's, and St. Thomas' Hospitals Medical Students' Association**

**Peer-Assisted Learning Program**

**Facilitator Handbook**

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## Introduction

The Guy's, King's, and St. Thomas' Medical Students Association Peer-Assisted Learning Program (MSA PAL) is a large scale near-peer teaching program developed in 2014 following a very successful pilot scheme (the KCL MSA Peer Teaching Program) earlier that year. This program was set up by the MSA to supplement specific areas in the training of medical students; areas that senior students and the academic community feel deserve more focus than they receive in the current curriculum, and to aid the development of skills that will be useful in their future careers

This handbook serves as a guide for medical students keen to participate in this program as facilitators.

## Disclaimers

MSA PAL is an entirely student-led and student-run program and has no official connection with the School of Medical Education. As a facilitator you will be expected to make this clear to your group and provide a minimum of four sessions over the term of content which is relevant and well resourced. Please remember, PAL is not designed to be a replacement for any part of the core curriculum. Finally, data from the program will be collected for evaluation by the MSA (and potentially for research purposes, however in that event, all data collection will be anonymised).

## Program Aims and Objectives

The MSA believes that the ability to effectively learn from the medical community is one of the most important skills that a student can acquire in medical school. As the rate of knowledge expansion, and therefore the rate of knowledge obsolescence, increases so quickly, the skill of learning from peers must be acquired early and fostered throughout medical school and clinical practice. Additionally, you will teach juniors (whether these are colleagues or students) throughout your career to some degree. This program has been set up to assist medical students in gaining and developing these skills.

The key aims and objectives this program focuses on are as follows.

### Student Aims

The Phase 2 PAL program is designed to foster group problem solving and co-operation skills while recapping key areas of their scenario-based curriculum. Phase 2 students are also encouraged to develop presentation skills, possibly for the first time, and to critically think about their curriculum and exams from multiple perspectives.

The Phase 3 PAL program aims to supplement other clinical teaching by offering a group-based learning environment focussing on coverage of core topics. These topics are considered to be key points by senior medical students and aim to fill in the gaps between the differing learning opportunities that come with being placed in different hospital sites with different clinical opportunities. Furthermore, at the beginning of the rotation, the facilitator's objective is to streamline the experience of changing rotations and clinical environments by assisting students in developing their basic knowledge of a new rotation such as examination skills, history taking skills, and basic clinical knowledge of their own specialty. Finally, this program offers students the opportunity to improve their presentation and basic teaching skills.

The Phase 4 PAL program is a new concept and will allow Phase 5 students to teach core topics within certain rotations, they may address difficult areas that previous students had difficulty grasping. The general layout is the same as the phase 3 PAL programme but will be delivered at a faster pace since the rotations are shorter.

The Phase 5-led PAL program aims to run shorter courses and sessions on specific topics, ideally tying together knowledge gained from different rotations, years, and experiences. Due to the nature of this learning experience, these sessions will only be open for students in Phases 3 and 4

### Facilitator Aims

A key aim for this program is to allow clinical-year medical students to acquire and improve teaching skills; a topic which has little emphasis placed on it in the MBBS curriculum.

At the very basic level in any program, a facilitator will develop the basic ability to communicate information to their students in a format that students can learn from. Other skills that facilitators will practice and develop include fostering group interaction and communication; managing and focussing a small group in learning sessions; providing adequate, constructive, and relevant feedback to students; and the construction of interesting, productive, and moderated teaching sessions in response to the needs of the students.

Importantly, this program requires each student that takes part to complete a feedback form after a teaching session. This feedback is essential for a facilitator's improvement and can be used to track a facilitator's progression over their series of sessions.

As well as common aims, each specific program places more emphasis on particular elements. The Phase 2 PAL program focuses on improving a facilitators group management, information delivery skills, and feedback management skills. The Phase 3 PAL program asks facilitators to balance their sessions against the evolving demands of students in a clinical environment and fosters flexibility and deeper understanding of their student group. The Phase 5-led PAL program asks facilitators to take a leading role in setting up a program and helps medical students gain the confidence needed to lead sessions as postgraduates.

## Program Structures

To cater for the differences between phases in the MBBS curriculum, the MSA PAL program in each phase has been designed separately to suit the respective students' needs and curricula.

### Phase 2 PAL

In this program, a group of 4 facilitators from Phase 3<sup>1</sup> will facilitate sessions for their small group ( $\leq 15$  students) of allocated Phase 2 students. Facilitators interested in taking part may apply alone to be facilitators, or may link their applications with other students to apply in pairs or teams of four. Facilitators who link their applications will be organised to be in teams with their linked pairs. All students are asked to explain which scenarios they are interested in teaching and will be allocated partners who have complimentary teaching interests to the best of our ability. Please note that, regardless of linked applications, each applicant must fill out their own application form.

Each tutorial will cover a single scenario of the Phase 2 course, or will cover a relevant key concept in the course. Ideally, each tutorial will take place 1 to 3 weeks after the scenario is taught in the MBBS course and will aim to provide consolidation or review of the scenario.

Between one team of four facilitators, every scenario must be covered by a tutorial. Therefore, they should allocate a reasonably equal amount of scenarios between each team member ( $23 \text{ scenarios} / 4 \text{ facilitators} = \text{each facilitator leads either 5 or 6 sessions}$ ). However, a flexible method of dividing scenarios between facilitators is acceptable, for example if the team decides that a scenario needs to be facilitated by two people, or working around one of the facilitators being on a peripheral placement. Facilitators are expected to develop and improve their skills by observing and communicating with their teammates to evaluate and amend their own performance.

Students will be attached to a team of four facilitators for the entire year. This way, a relationship between the team and the students can be developed and feedback from one session can be directly implemented into the next session, catering to the students' needs. Facilitators are encouraged to contact students before each session to gauge current understanding and confidence in order to tailor their own sessions to be most effective.

Feedback is an essential part of all of the MSA PAL programs, and facilitators are responsible for ensuring that each student attending their session completes an online feedback form using the TypeForm online application. Students who have not completed feedback for the session will be considered to have not attended the session. Students missing more than a reasonable number of sessions for each program will be barred from all future sessions. More information regarding this feedback method will be released in the future.

The content of each session can be flexible as per the facilitator's choice, being free to design it in whatever way they feel is most useful to their students. However, emphasis should be placed on encouraging student interactivity. Sessions should last approximately 1 hour and should ideally not exceed 90 minutes.

To facilitate the development of the students' presentation skills, it is required that at least one (but ideally two) Phase 2 student per session spend approximately five minutes leading the session in exploring a single-best answer question of his or her own design on the topic of the tutorial. They are expected to lead a discussion on the reasoning behind each of the answers and to elaborate for a few minutes on the scientific knowledge behind the question. These questions (along with the

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<sup>1</sup> Students from phases 4 and 5 are also able to be facilitators in this program if they desire, but are strongly encouraged to teach more senior students in other MSA PAL programs

explanations for their answers) will be collated and evaluated by the MSA Academic team into a question bank that will then be freely open to all students in the future.

### Phase 3 PAL

In this program, students from Phase 4<sup>2</sup> will facilitate sessions organised around core topics to for small groups of Phase 3 students. Facilitators may run sessions by themselves or in pairs, and will be allocated students who are in the same hospital site cluster as them. Facilitators will be expected to run tutorials throughout the first two terms of the phase 3 curriculum covering a certain number of key topics in either rotation A, B, or C.

Phase 4 students interested in taking part as facilitators will need to complete the relevant application form in which they are asked to rank in order of preference the rotations they would like to facilitate sessions on. Using this ranking system, facilitators will be allocated a rotation to provide sessions for, dependent on the level of interest from the Phase 3 students

These topics will represent what are thought to be key basic topics in each rotation (e.g. Rotation C topics will include myocardial infarction, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, asthma, etc.). A list of these key topics will be available on the MSA website. These sessions are not meant to be strictly didactic, but are recommended to encourage collaboration and shared learning. The best method to cover these specific sessions is left to the facilitator(s) to decide with their students, but as part of each teaching session, it is required that at least one student (but ideally two) make a presentation (around 10 minutes each) to the group on one of the core topics, a clinical concept, or a patient case that demonstrates the above (students should not be repurposing work they have already done for these session). The purpose of this exercise is to aid students' learning and develop presentation skills in a low-pressure environment (with constructive feedback).

Sessions may also include some time on more practical concerns (e.g. respiratory and cardiology examinations, role plays, clinical skills such as arterial blood gas interpretation) – having students write role plays is an excellent way of understanding and remembering presentations and is inevitably more productive than “making them up as you go along”. Particularly good scripts and vignettes will hopefully be collated by the MSA Academic team to be distributed on the MSA website.

Facilitators who manage to cover these key topics are free to continue running sessions on what they and their students agree to be important topics. Furthermore, where students have already covered certain topics in other clinical teaching well, facilitators are not obligated to run a session on the same topic and should focus on covering something different.

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### Phase 4 PAL

In this program, students from Phase 5<sup>2</sup> will facilitate sessions organised around core topics to for small groups of Phase 4 students. Facilitators may run sessions by themselves or in pairs, and will be allocated students who are in the same hospital site cluster as them. Facilitators will be expected to run tutorials throughout the first two terms of the phase 4 curriculum covering a certain number of key topics in either rotation CHDA, RSH or EMTL.

Phase 5 students interested in taking part as facilitators will need to complete the relevant application form in which they are asked to rank in order of preference the rotations they would like to facilitate sessions on. Using this ranking system, facilitators will be allocated a rotation to provide sessions for, dependent on the level of interest from the Phase 4 students

These sessions are not meant to be strictly didactic, but are recommended to encourage collaboration and shared learning. The best method to cover these specific sessions is left to the facilitator(s) to decide with their students, but as part of each teaching session, it is required that at least one student (but ideally two) make a presentation (around 10 minutes each) to the group on one of the core topics, a clinical concept, or a patient case that demonstrates the above (students should not be repurposing work they have already done for these session). The purpose of this exercise is to aid students' learning and develop presentation skills in a low-pressure environment (with constructive feedback).

Sessions may also include some time on more practical concerns (e.g. locomotion examinations, role plays, clinical skills such as management) – having students write role plays is an excellent way of understanding and remembering presentations and is inevitably more productive than “making them up as you go along”. Particularly good scripts and vignettes will hopefully be collated by the MSA Academic team to be distributed on the MSA website.

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## Phase 5-led PAL

This program allows Phase 5 students to take charge of setting up their own teaching sessions throughout the year i.e. this will not run as a pre-existing scheme that you can sign up to as for Phase 2 and Phase 3. Under the banner of MSA PAL, interested students may develop their own education program proposals (which may be a single event) and present them to an MSA team for assistance in developing, organising, publicising, and funding.

They should be targeted towards Phase 3 and 4 students and not simply duplicate pre-existing teaching. The aim is to stage these opportunities throughout the year, supplementing the needs of the relevant students at each stage of their curriculum as needed.

As one of the goals of this program is to develop the teaching skills of Phase 5 students, students interested in teaching must apply with both a proposal and a proposed feedback form (a proforma feedback form will be available). The MSA will be able to offer assistance in collating and utilising feedback if needed.

Students interested in developing a project or event are encouraged to think back on their own experiences in Phases 3 and 4 and organise programs that make a practical impact on the education of current students.

## Contact Details

We hope you have found this handbook useful.

The MSA PAL team are more than happy to answer any questions or listen to any suggestions you might have about the course, this handbook, running your session, or anything else – the easiest way to contact us is to email:

PAL@gktmsa.co.uk

Best wishes,

The MSA PAL Team

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## Acknowledgments

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