Rapid Expectation Setting for Learners in the Emergency Department

Expectation setting is crucial to facilitate optimal learning in clinical environments. Discrepancy between expectations and reality has been established as a key component of burnout.[1] Currently, burnout is at epidemic levels among emergency medicine (EM) residents and medical students.[1–4] Prevailing psychological models of burnout show that psychological stressors are moderated by the expectations of those stressors. Under these models, expectation–reality discrepancy (ERD) enhances stressors, whereas well-formed expectations can act as a "shield" against them (Figure 1). Medical students and residents both experience ERD in clinical learning environments.[5,6] For instance, ERD occurs when medical students expect to deliver a "medicine-style" oral presentation and the attending asks them to be brief, including only the pertinent information. ERD similarly occurs for residents when they anticipate feedback at the end of shift, but the attending chooses to e-mail them feedback several days later. While presentations and feedback are typical parts of every ED shift, variations in style from attending to attending are usually impossible to predict, creating ERD. To minimize ERD, tools are needed that can facilitate the rapid exchange of expectations between supervisors and learners.

Expectation setting is particularly difficult in the ED. Unlike on a longitudinal service, expectations cannot be gleaned over the course of days or weeks. A dynamic interchange of attendings and learners occurs with each shift change, and a learner may only work with a supervisor once or twice over the course of his or her rotation. While EM clerkship directors and residency program directors can help set common expectations for learners, clinical teachers will always have important variations on these norms. This Med Ed Download provides a tool for expectation setting in the ED. Ideally, each educator in

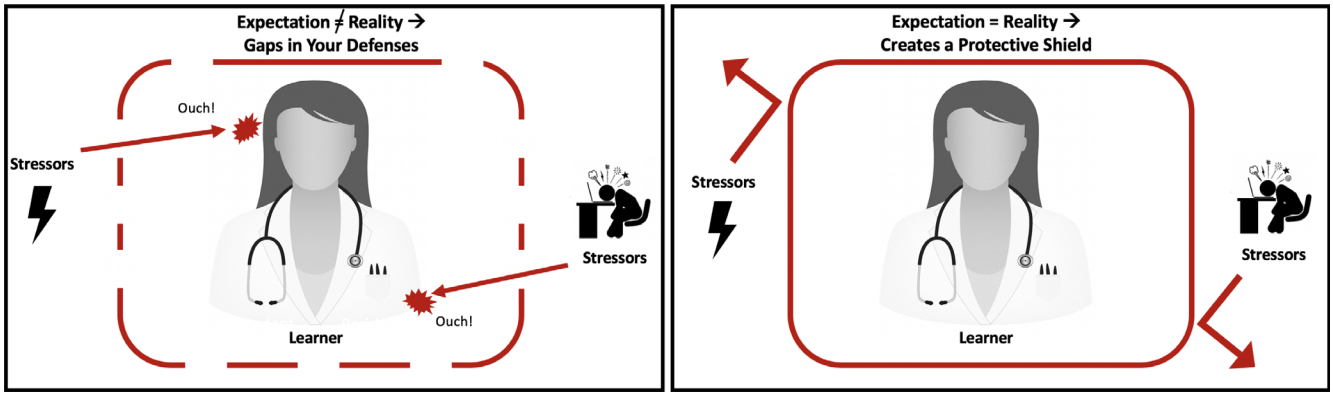

Figure 1. Effects of ERD: When expectations do not match reality, learners are more vulnerable to stressors in the clinical learning environment. When expectations match reality, learners experience a protective "shield" against stress and burnout

Presented at the AAMC Central Group on Educational Affairs Annual Meeting, Grand Rapids, MI, March 2019 (Student Presentation Travel Award Winner); and Learn Serve Lead 2019: The AAMC Annual Meeting, Phoenix, AZ, November 2019.
The authors have no relevant financial information to disclose.
The University of Michigan Medical School and MD received funding through the AMA ChangeMedEd program.
Author contributions: MS performed initial data gathering and analysis of expectation–reality discrepancy; EM developed the initial expectation-setting tool template; MS, EM, and MD modified the template for use in emergency medicine; and MS, EM, and MD wrote and revised the manuscript.

doi: 10.1002/aet2.10433

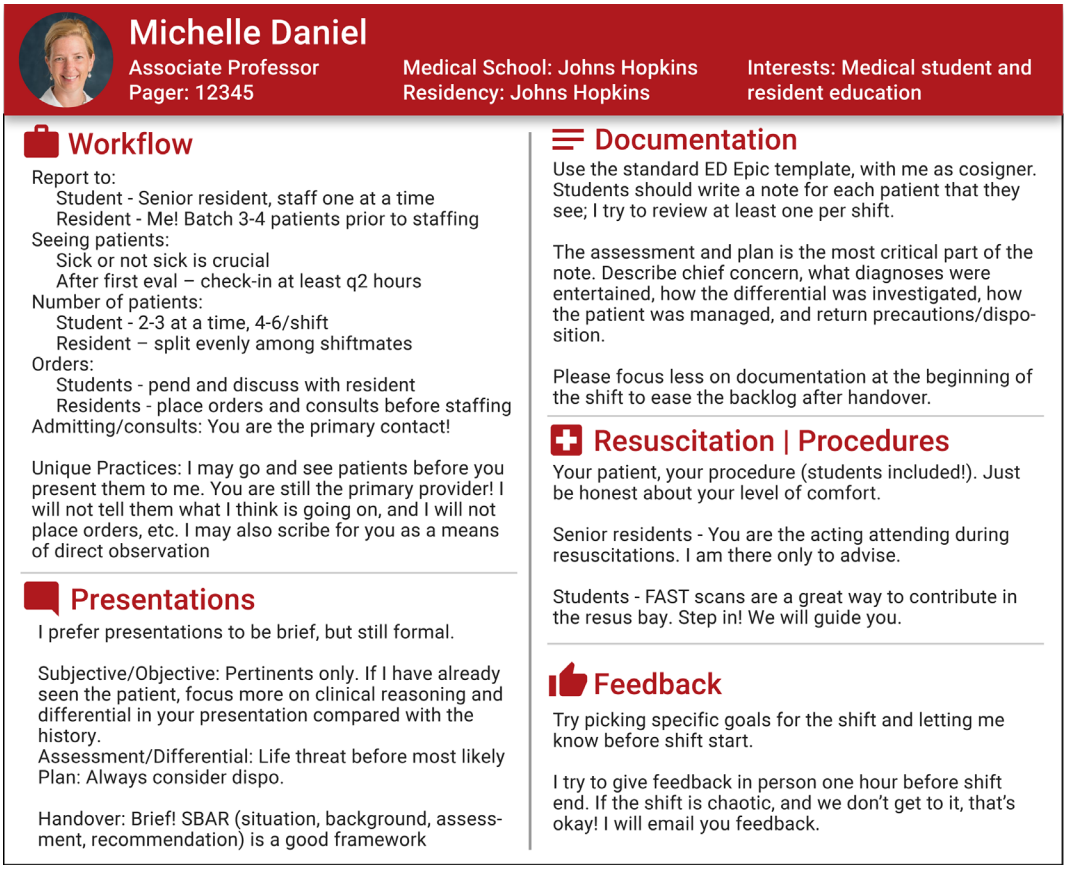

Figure 2. A sample expectations document.

the emergency department fills out an expectations document (Figure 2) detailing his or her *unique* expectations for learners. This may be shared with the learner in person at the *beginning of a shift*, sent via e-mail, or shared via an online repository *before a shift*. The aim is to facilitate a rapid exchange of expectations to reduce the amount of ERD experienced by learners in the ED.

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Supervising Editor: Anne Messman, MD

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