

Goodbye Millennials, Hello Generation Z!

Who is Generation Z?

Generation Z, also referred to as the “post-millennials”, applies to those born between 1995 and 2012. They are the first generation to have always had the internet and social networking. They are the most diverse generation in terms of race, gender and sexual orientation. They have spent more time with electronics and the internet than any other generation.

How may the medical education of Generation Z learners differ from other generations?

Generation Z learners are very adept and comfortable with technology. This means that podcasts, blogs, simulation, interactive tutorials, and internet-based educational games should be incorporated into their curriculum when appropriate. Social media will be an effective tool for recruitment and communication with these learners as they are very comfortable with social media and most use it regularly. Although they are able to find information easily, they may not analyze it for validity. Educators will have to work to ensure that Generation Z learners are using proper learning materials and will need to teach Gen Z learners how to appraise resources for quality.

Gen Z learners prefer not to spend long periods of time in lecture. Lectures may be more effective if they are short. Active learning techniques should be used when possible; the flipped classroom is a promising modality that may be particularly effective with Generation Z learners. They also particularly value on-the-job learning and hands-on experience. Emergency medicine should have little problem maximizing our opportunity to offer education in this way as on-the-job learning and hands-on experience are the rule rather than the exception. Because they are accustomed to immediate feedback on social media, Generation Z learners may expect that faculty is available on demand. Expectations and availability will need to be clearly delineated to the learners to mitigate any negative effects the learners may perceive if faculty is not available 24/7.

Gen Z learners will likely expect customization of their education. It will not be acceptable to them to be given a standard curriculum and told “this is always the way we have done this;” existing programs will need to be justified if they don’t seem pertinent to the education of the Gen Z learner. They value programs that allow and encourage plasticity so this should be emphasized during recruitment. They also value social change and wellness; they will look for programs that interact with the community locally and programs that emphasize global health. Emergency medicine programs should look to capitalize on these opportunities.

Generation Z learners sound great! Are there any drawbacks?

Generation Z learners have spent so much time with technology that it may adversely affect their in-person communication skills. Communication skills should be assessed early and often; direct observation and role playing activities may help to assess Gen Z learners’ communication skills. Because they may have had less personal interactions, Gen Z learners may also be less emotionally resilient than their predecessors. Programs will need to be cognizant of this and sensitive to the wellness of Gen Z learners.

References:

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