

# Nurse Liaison Creates Teachable Moments for Brain Injury Support Group Clients

Kristine Longo RN, CRRN

## Purpose

The Socratic Method of teaching was implemented in our brain injury outpatient support group to help develop the client's ability to increase their knowledge of health related topics. This method is an exploratory model of inquiry that promotes independent thinking skills. This approach provides feedback which allows the "teacher" to monitor participants understanding during the teaching and learning process.

## Review of Literature

Successful coping in brain injured individuals and their families during the Early Adjustment Phase has been associated with having adequate social support and information. Other things that increase coping is, involvement in work, [attending groups support](#), use of religion and involvement in recreational activities.

Strategies individuals and their families found helpful in coping in the Later Adjustment Phase include, maintaining a healthy outlook, [participating in a support group](#), seeking respite and obtaining information on the long term effects of the brain injury, especially when associated with behavior and emotional disturbances.

Social support is beneficial in the early and long term phases of recovering and coping with a brain injury. This is a key component to community based interventions designed to maximize adjustment post brain injury.

## Method

### Foundation of the Socratic Method

- Named after the Greek philosopher, Socrates.
- Teaching by guided questioning.
- Teaching by asking instead of telling.
- Stimulates and challenges the learner along with increasing curiosity and arouses thinking.
- Gives the "teacher" constant feedback, thus allowing monitoring of understanding.
- The questioning must be of interest to the student.

### Using the Socratic Method

- The instructor will start with an open ended question about the subject to be discussed.
- The students then counter with their responses.
- The key is that there is respectful discussion and not a heated debate.
- Plan questions that provide structure and direction of the lesson.
- Phrase the questions clearly and specifically.
- Wait for the students to respond.

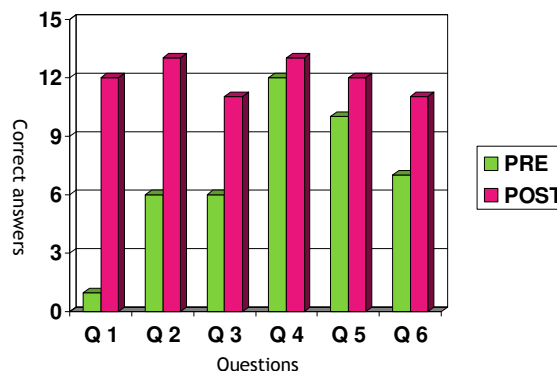
## Method (continued)

### Key Points for Success

- Keep the discussion focused.
- Follow up on responses and invite them to elaborate.
- Stimulate the discussion with probing questions.
- Periodically summarize what has been discussed.
- DO NOT pose yes/no questions, as they do little to promote thinking and discussion.
- DO NOT pose questions beyond the level of the student.

## Data

Lyme Disease Knowledge Assessment



## Results

At the start of the meeting the clients were asked if they would participate in answering questions before and after the presentation. It was explained to them that this would be confidential and the data would evaluate to see if improved learning had occurred using a specific teaching method. Fifteen clients agreed to participate. The questions were given out and then collected prior to starting the lesson. The presentation was approximately 10 minutes in length using the Socratic Method of teaching as described earlier. The same questions were then given out again, and the pre/post answers were compared. More correct answers were given after the lesson, than before, as seen in the graph above.

## Conclusion

A teachable moment can be created out of any amount of time. It does not need to be an hour long presentation to be effective. The "15 minute focus" would become a 5-15 minute focus session on a topic chosen by the liaison or the clients. These lessons are brief and to the point, with a take home message relevant to the client(s). At the end of each meeting each client is given a bulleted highlight sheet of the discussion to take home.

A shorter focused topic enables these clients to increase active participation by asking pertinent questions in order to form an understanding of the topic.

**The Socratic Method has enabled clients to increase their knowledge about health related topics in a supportive environment conducive to learning.**

After initiating this method of teaching, there was an increase in client participation in asking questions pertinent to the topic being presented. Some have reported back to the group after using strategies discussed that have been helpful to them. Clients have also asked follow up questions to previous presented topics.

Increased participation is due to:

Clients comfortable with the process and the routine of the Socratic Method of teaching.

Established trusting relationship between liaison and clients.  
Increased awareness of client interests for topics.

## Recommendations

Advancing the health care knowledge of the participants in a support group first requires the identification of the learning needs for the groups population. In a brain injury support group the residual effects of the brain injury may include, poor short term memory, poor attention and difficulty staying on task. These skills are all vital for learning to occur. It is important to find ways to keep the client engaged in the topic. This is best accomplished by encouraging expression of ideas, supporting "on topic" conversation and asking leading questions in order to assist the client to establish an understanding and expand their knowledge.

## References

Maxwell, M. (2009). Introduction to the Socratic Method and It's Effects on Critical Thinking By Max Maxwell. Retrieved from <http://class.phys.psu.edu/PER/Articles/SocraticDialog.pdf>

Garlikov, R. (2006). The Socratic Method: Teaching by Asking Instead of Telling. Retrieved from [http://www.garlikov.com/Soc\\_Meth.html](http://www.garlikov.com/Soc_Meth.html).

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