AQUIFER
Your trusted source for clinical learning

# Helping the Struggling Learner: Learner Supports

The following scenarios discussed in the *How to Help the Struggling Learner: From Early Signals to Targeted Support* webinar highlight common areas in which learners may benefit from targeted support and identify Aquifer resources that can help address each need.

**Scenario 1:** If you have a student who struggles to organize knowledge into a prioritized differential diagnosis during a patient encounter, here are some recommended Aquifer resources:

- *Internal Medicine 01: 49-year-old with chest pain* (Virtual Patient Encounter)
  Practice with taking a history from a virtual patient and then creating a prioritized differential diagnosis after receiving the full patient history.
- Additional Aquifer cases:
  - *Diagnostic Excellence 01: Principles of diagnostic excellence*
    Teaches illness scripts, problem representation, semantic qualifiers, and how to create a prioritized differential diagnosis.
  - *Diagnostic Excellence 03: 16-year-old with pelvic pain*
    Explicit practice in creating a prioritized differential with evidence for and against each item and addressing cognitive biases.
  - *Diagnostic Excellence 05: 84-year-old with sepsis*
    Introduces checklists and cognitive forcing strategies to broaden differentials and reduce diagnostic errors.
  - *Neurology 10 / Pediatrics 20: 7 year-old with headache*
    Introduces practice writing summary statements / problem representations to focus thinking and activate appropriate illness scripts.
- Case Analysis Tool
  Students can complete this worksheet while working through an Aquifer case that helps highlight their clinical reasoning; these worksheets can then be turned in for formative feedback if desired by the educator.

© Aquifer, Inc. 2026

**Scenario 2:** If you have a student whose medical knowledge is appropriate, but that knowledge is not translating into effective communication during difficult conversations, here are some recommended Aquifer resources:

- (Prework) *Palliative Care 03: Family meetings and establishing goals of care*
  Teaches structured frameworks for delivering serious news (SPIKES), responding to emotion, and planning family conferences.
- (Interactive Practice & Feedback) *Internal Medicine 27: 65-year-old with hypercalcemia* (Virtual Patient Encounter)
  Provides Ask–Tell–Ask and concrete phrasing for delivering bad news and managing the immediate emotional response. Good for practicing wording and pacing.
- (Extension activity) *Social Determinants of Health 02: 2-year-old with fever and headache*
  Useful when communication breakdowns are due to language, cultural mismatch, or interpreter use; includes practical interpreter strategies and relational communication tips.

**Scenario 3:** If you have a student who is gathering plenty of information, but the oral presentations do not clearly communicate their clinical reasoning, here are some recommended Aquifer resources:

- *Oral Presentation Skills 01-04*
  Reviews the key elements of an effective clinical presentation and provides a clear structure to apply.
- (Extension Activity) *Diagnostic Excellence 01: Principles of diagnostic excellence*
  Teaches the concept of problem representation and use of semantic qualifiers to create concise oral summaries.

© Aquifer, Inc. 2026