

Grand Rounds Idol | A Way To Make Grand Rounds Grand Again

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There was a time, dear reader, that when there was a new medical idea, the originator of that new idea would have a significant problem in disseminating the information. How could he spread the word?

He would have to publish it in a medical journal, then endure the interminable wait for acceptance. Or perhaps the idea would spread slowly by word of mouth in the local medical community. If the idea were truly creative, innovative or interesting, maybe he would be invited to give Grand Rounds at a hospital or a medical center in another city.

The doctor would close his office. He would book a sleeper on the Empire Limited, and he would be off. When he arrived at his destination, he would be met by a representative of the institution that had invited him. He would be suitably ensconced in a high-end hotel. Then the festivities would begin.

There would be a reception dinner in his honor. The guest would deliver some witty or profound after-dinner remarks. Formal bedside rounds would follow at the hosting hospital. These rounds with students and staff would probe the visitor's diagnostic acumen. The visitor, in turn, would probe the knowledge of those who had invited him. A lively give-and-take led to a grand demonstration of intellect and medical expertise. Then he would deliver his Grand Rounds address.

We are talking of a time when the word and the concept were the king and the queen of medical education.

We are talking of a time when the speaker would be judged on the significance of his concept as well as the clarity of his thought, the brilliance of his delivery and the ability to verbally sustain the audience's interest.

We are talking of a time when a bullet point was ... well ... the point of a bullet!

This is how it has been for the past 100 years. No PowerPoint.¹ No slides. No video. No blogs. No podcasts. No YouTube.com or text messages.

But all that has changed.

All that was before medical departments were transformed from primarily educational entities to primarily economic entities. All that preceded the great societal shift from the verbal and the written to the visual and the aural. This great conceptual shift has made Grand Rounds, in their current form, with rare exception, obsolete. Grand Rounds have become an expensive remnant of a bygone day—an expense most medical institutions should eliminate.

But we, dear reader, are going to change this.

We are going to shock the world of Grand Rounds!

We are going to do for Grand Rounds what “Siskel & Ebert” did for films. (I never could quite figure out the difference between a movie and a film. John Wayne made movies.)

We are going to do for aspiring Grand Rounds speakers what “American Idol” has done for aspiring singers. In short, we are going to join the 48 million Americans (about one-sixth of our population) who use the Internet to post an opinion on the Web.²

I present:

www.GrandRoundsIdol.com

A Web site that will allow medical groups to invite speakers and presenters who truly have something new to say and who can say it effectively.

A Web site extolling the talents of speakers who can dazzle an audience with a clear presentation of a new idea, or an even clearer presentation of an old idea updated for current medical use.

Speakers who are worth the price of a Grand Rounds invitation.

Let the medical marketplace decide who is going to be invited!

www.GrandRoundsIdol.com

Using the power of the Internet in a free-market economy to make Grand Rounds grand again!

For those unfamiliar with the current method of the selection of Grand Rounds speakers, let me flesh out the process.

Dr. Audrey Nordlinger-Schiffman, associate assistant professor of surgery, is deeply involved in the effects of 2,3-sid-nethyl-philnester esteresterase on the Wistar rat bladder courtesy of a large NIH grant. Professor Nordlinger-Schiffman's friend (usually a resident-mate from the “old days” or, even better, a relative or, even better than that, an individual critical to the inviter's career advancement) is the Grand Rounds co-coordinator at the medical center.

Suddenly, the Grand Rounds co-coordinator generates a departmental interest in Wistar rat bladders. This makes it essential for the educational program that Professor Nordlinger-Schiffman *herself* be invited to give Grand Rounds. Our department, in the name of education, must be sensitized to the threat of Wistar rat bladders, and therefore Professor Nordlinger-Schiffman must be invited to speak!

What follows is repeated weekly at medical centers throughout the world.

The first-class airline tickets are arranged. The junior suite (with mini-bar privileges) is booked. The appropriate resident becomes the designated driver. The famous “faculty dinner” is arranged.

I digress to describe this gastronomic exercise. This dinner, by Grand Rounds custom, must be at a trendy restaurant. This restaurant must serve veal slices the size of postage stamps and steaks that can hide under a mushroom (a shitake, of course). Arugula must be plentiful. The waiters must have ponytails and the chef must be schooled in reduction sauces.

The meal is served. The bar tab increases faster than compound interest in a Kennedy trust fund.

As this culinary orgy progresses, you, dear reader, are approaching the packaging of a microwaved breakfast burrito with a pair of scissors at a nursing station.

Now, after the brulées and soufflés comes the obligatory after-dinner drink menu. (Which, I believe, is the single greatest marketing ploy of the American restaurant industry. It's not enough to pay \$11 for a shot of Johnnie Black *before* dinner. Now, *after* the meal, they want \$25 for a shot of the Glenfarkenber.)

Oddly, the conversations at this dinner

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room far and wide from the Wistar rat bladder. The old days are resurrected. The academic goings and comings are discussed. The rumors, the resignations, the scandals and the reorganizations are analyzed. Professor Audrey Nordlinger-Schiffman, sated and abuzz with a 1993 Verumontanum Cabernet (with a good nose and subtle tannins), is escorted back to her mini-suite. She checks out the available movies (discreetly billed as “in-room entertainment”) and slips into that post-prandial antral “I can’t believe they are paying me for this” coma known only to visiting professors.

Early the next morning, the resident-*schlepper* driver picks her up. Grand Rounds are about to begin. The audience is in the traditional Grand Rounds receptive mode.

The audience is then read:

The Grand Rounds Miranda Rights

“We are pleased to have Professor Audrey Nordlinger-Schiffman here with us this morning.

She has the right to have graduated from a prestigious medical school.

She has the right to have trained at a world-class institution.

She has the right to be a member of various societies.

She has the right to have published several papers.”

But, dear reader, www.GrandRoundsIdol.com will add something to this pro forma introduction.

“Professor Audrey Nordlinger-Schiffman, anything you say can and will be used for or against you in the free-market court of medical opinion. Your presentation will be reviewed by our audience on:



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www.GrandRoundsIdol.com.”

Let us add:

“You have the right to rework your presentation to make it more interesting. If you cannot afford the time to rework your presentation, you should not have accepted our invitation in the first place. Do you understand what I have just said?” Then, and only then, will the visiting professor deliver her remarks.

We must be honest with our evaluations. If the presentation is mind numbing, let’s hear about it! If the speaker is droning on and on with a mishmash of muddy data, let’s hear about it!

On the other hand, if the speaker is brilliant and shares her insights in an innovative way, if she is inspiring and appealing—dare I say, if the speaker is “grand”—we want to hear about that also.

Attend your Grand Rounds. Evaluate the presentation for clarity, interest, speaking style, and the ability to transmit information in an appealing and understandable manner. Send a review (perhaps from your Blackberry as you sit in the audience) to GrandRoundsIdol@Gmail.com with a critique of the speaker. Let us, the free market of medical opinion, decide who is invited to speak!

These reviews will be collated by name, date, title and location. They will be categorized on www.GrandRoundsIdol.com. Unsuspecting medical institutions will no longer fall prey to the dull speaker, the faulty data or the tenured mumbler.

Out of fairness to the invitee, have the department co-coordinator tell the speaker that her expenses will be reimbursed *pending a review of these GrandRoundsIdol critiques*. If the presentation is not grand, the expense of the trip and the dinner is on her! Think of what this will do for speakers at these events!

www.GrandRoundsIdol.com will put Grand Rounds speakers on notice that in an economically restricted environment, they must be a grand speaker and have a grand message at Grand Rounds. If a speaker anticipates negative reviews and must pay her own way, she might think twice about accepting the invitation.

After a while, maybe, just maybe, we can make Grand Rounds grand again!

References

1. Altman, LK. Socratic dialogue gives way to Powerpoint. “The Doctor’s World,” *The New York Times*. December 12, 2006.
2. Rose F. Let the seller beware. *Wall Street Journal*. December 20, 2006. Book review of *Citizen Marketers*, by Ben McConnell and Jackie Huba (Kaplan Publishing).