

COLLABORATIVE ASSESSMENT OF COMMUNICATION SKILLS: THE UMBRELLA CONSORTIUM FOR ASSESSMENT NETWORKS (UCAN)

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Background

Studies indicate a link between adequate doctor-patient communication and patients' well-being. Consequently, legal requirements as well as health policies call for a stronger focus on the training of communication competences in medical education and more importantly, the assessment that these trainings were successful.

To provide a meaningful picture about medical students' communication competencies, the assessment methods need to fulfill certain quality indicators like validity, reliability and objectivity. Creating and conducting such assessments can be very resource-intensive.

Methods

To face these challenges, institutions need to work together. To facilitate this cooperation, the "Umbrella-Consortium-for-Assessment-Networks" (UCAN) was initiated 10 years ago. Until now, 60 institutions from seven countries share their knowledge, combine their resources and engage in assessment research.

Together, we developed an online platform for authoring, sharing and reviewing different types of assessments. The integration of structured oral examinations and OSCEs made it possible to collaborate in assessing practical and communicative skills. These oral and practical assessments can

be conducted with tablet computers since 2012. Furthermore, a database was added for the management of simulated patients often used in OSCEs (role, billing and appointments). Finally, test statistics (including the inter-rater operability during OSCEs) can be used to ensure objective, reliable and valid assessments.

Findings

Until 2016, over 1650 OSCE-stations were authored, exchanged and successfully used in 600 assessments at 21 institutions. Best practice examples for reliable assessments, their content and workflows were collected.

Tablet computers are now used in 19 institutions. This facilitated data sampling used to ensure the objectivity, reliability and validity of exams: more than 1,500,000 statistical indicators have been uploaded to the system. Regarding the system for simulated patients, 4,500 appointments with 360 simulated patients were managed within the platform.

The usage of the common platform helps saving time for calculating assessment results, reduces errors and facilitates the whole workflow.

Discussion

10 years of cooperation has proven to be an efficient way to face new challenges in medical assessment. With future requirements for assessing practical and communication skills, further collaboration is highly recommendable. The successful cooperation at UCAN shows that a cooperative approach is both innovative and efficient.