

Evaluation of undergraduate medical students: need for a change

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Both formative and summative evaluation is an integral part of undergraduate medical education. Formative evaluation will provide feedback to the students and help them to improve their knowledge and skill. Summative evaluation or the final examination prepares medical students to provide quality health service to the population. The final examination should aim at maintaining a minimum standard so that a medical graduate could practice the art of medicine with confident and dignity. Continuous assessment of medical students with feedback is one of the best ways of helping them in acquiring useful knowledge and skill.

The present system of evaluation of medical students has many drawbacks and need immediate modification. The present system of evaluation has many desirable and unreasonable components which have to be given due attention. The evaluation system followed by many universities and institutions consist of theory and practical examinations.

Many institutions are still using essay and open-ended short answer questions, which are very difficult to evaluate because of the involvement of subjective elements. There may be wide variations in the result of evaluations between two evaluators because of the lack of objective criteria.

To cover a wide range of subjects and to get rid of the examiner's bias, multiple choice questions and objective structured questions should be introduced. Various types of MCQs have their own advantages and disadvantages. While introducing any instrument of evaluation due attention should be given to its reliability, validity and feasibility. The most popular MCQs all over the world are best single response questions with five alternatives. In many health

institutions of Nepal the four alternatives with 25% possibility of guessing is popular. The possibility of guessing decreases to 20% if five alternatives are used in the construction of best single response MCQs. The objective structural close-ended short answer questions can be included to test the terminal competency of a medical student.

In the practical examination of final year MBBS examination, the present system consists of clinical examination, a few OSCE questions and viva. In practice recall questions are asked both in viva and practical examination. Such questions can be asked in OSCE and/or OSPE, which are useful in evaluating large number of students in a short period of time without any examiner bias. In the present system of examination of medial students, internal examiners also have equal say in the assessment, which is not desirable in countries like ours.

To maintain the minimum standard of evaluation of the medical students, the present test instrument must be reliable and feasible. One long case to know the general performance and to find the attitude of a candidate could continue as before. A 20 station OSCE could be introduced. Some questions could have short cases and structural viva questions. This will avoid the examiner's bias and will give equal opportunity to all candidates. University should have OSCE banks and to maintain the uniform standard of the examination, the university should introduce the OSCE examination.

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