Objective structured clinical examination (OSCE): how to do it seriously despite scarce resources

• Martin R Fischer

Workshop

The OSCE is an assessment format for clinical skills. It has first been described 32 years ago and has spread worldwide since then. The German speaking community is finally adopting the OSCE to emphasize the importance of clinical competence of medical students and to broaden the scope of reliable assessment methods. Different OSCE’s have been developed over the last five years all over Germany. Among those, the medical faculty of Munich University comes a long way: The first “economy-style” OSCE was implemented in 1999, enabling one examiner to oversee four examinees simultaneously with a number of inevitable shortcomings and compromises. At present, two students per examiner are managed in Munich because standardized patients are responsible for check-list ratings themselves. The examining physician is present in the same room assessing the second student in parallel. This approach saves substantial examiner time and improves acceptance among busy clinicians.

At any rate, the implementation of an OSCE requires careful resource planning. After the presentation of the basic knowledge on the OSCE format and the Munich experiences, the workshop participants from all four Austrian medical faculties and a German faculty were asked to develop a plan for the logistics of an OSCE-parcours in small groups that meets their respective needs. The group work was presented and lead to different results concerning the number of planned stations and examinees, the number of parallel parcours, time sequence, and the obligations of examiners. All groups underlined the need for thorough examiners’ training. In summary, the OSCE is under way at all four Austrian faculties and will lead to different local routes of implementation.

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