

Title: Critical appraisal of assessment practices in undergraduate medical education in a developing country

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Context and setting: The assessment methods used in medical education not only influence what students ultimately learn but also how they learn. Educational impact is thus an important attribute of a good assessment tool.

Why the idea was necessary: The All-India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS), India is an autonomous tertiary care institute. Undergraduate students are exposed to a specialty oriented environment and there is perception that these students though knowledgeable, are not able to deal effectively with patients at completion of training. Keeping the role of assessments in mind, there have been various attempts to review the examination system. Most basic science and non-clinical disciplines have successfully revised their assessment methods. However, in the clinical disciplines assessment has followed traditional methods and few changes introduced over the last few years have not been sustained. This study was conducted to document the extent of alignment between existing assessment methods and expected outcomes of undergraduate medical education and make suggestions for improvement.

What was done: The study included the major undergraduate disciplines namely Medicine, Surgery, Pediatrics Obstetrics and Gynaecology. The key competencies required at the end of MBBS training programme were derived from the existing institutional and departmental documents, in consultation with senior faculty members. The information was collated and the expected competencies were grouped under 7 domains. A matrix was constructed showing the key competencies and the most suitable methods for assessing them using the ACGME assessment toolbox. A survey was conducted from heads of departments using structured interviews (4), and feedback questionnaires from the faculty (47) and interns (55). The survey questions were formulated to ascertain the present assessment methods used and perceptions about their adequacy and appropriateness.

Evaluation of results: The questionnaire response rate was 82.9 % and 70.9 % for the faculty and interns respectively. Most faculty and interns indicated that recall of knowledge was adequately assessed. Essays, short answer questions, and multiple choice questions were largely the methods used. History taking, physical examination, interpretation and clinical reasoning skills were perceived to be tested adequately. This was mostly done using clinical cases, and oral examination. There was limited assessment of procedural and communication skills, professional and ethical values and critical analysis of scientific literature.

The majority of faculty (89%) and interns (78%) expressed dissatisfaction with the existing assessment methods. Both groups agreed about the inadequacy of assessment of behavioral and communication skills and educational impact of assessment but students expressed more concern about the lack of consistency and objectivity in assessment and

lack of regular feedback. This study suggests that assessment methods most appropriate to curriculum objectives and programme outcomes need to be reviewed. A wider survey is required to study the extent of this problem in other medical colleges in India.

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