

Title: Assessment of communication skills of medical students by standardized patients with CIS instrument in China

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Context and setting: Communication skill is one of six required competencies identified by the Accreditation Council on Graduate Medical Education (ACGME) of the United States. Objective Structured Clinical Examination (OSCE) is used as a summative examination for the final year medical students (internship year) at China Medical University. In 2012, the assessment of communication skills was introduced as part of the OSCE. Standardized patients (SP) assessed students in communication and interpersonal skills with the translated CIS questionnaires from ECFMG of the United States. The questionnaire includes 10 items in three domains. Each of the 10 items was scored on a scale from 1 to 5.

Why the idea is necessary: The doctor-patient relationship in China faces many challenges with the rapid development of the health care and economic systems. The patients are increasingly frustrated at the lack of information from doctors and the doctors are under pressure to manage the relationship with patients. One of the most important reasons is the deficiency in training of physicians in communication skills in China. Therefore, the teaching and assessment of communication skills of Chinese students is very important as a component of an effective training program in medical school.

What was done: Twenty standardized patients from 5 different specialties (internal medicine, surgery, obstetrics&gynecology, psychiatry and pediatrics) took part in training workshops for the assessment of communication skills with the CIS questionnaires during April 2012. The level of communication skills of 130 internship students was assessed in 5 SP stations of the different specialties in the OSCE which was held at China Medical University in May 2012.

Evaluation of results and impact: Of the 130 medical students, the CIS scores ranged from 2.12 to 4.53, with a mean of 3.71(SD=3.65). The mean scores in three domains were: questioning skills 3.77+0.679, information-sharing skills 3.60+0.764 and professional manner and rapport 3.71+0.783. In all 3 items of the information-sharing skills domain and 2 items in the professional manner and rapport domain, less than 80% of students demonstrated the specific skills. Female students scored significantly higher in all the domains ($P < 0.05$). To improve the communication skills of medical students, medical schools should carry out more training, especially for the students in the transition to the clinical training period.