

Assessment of communication skills

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1. Communication skills are complex behavioral skills that need to be learned and assessed in the most authentic setting. For earlier stages of training role play, simulated patient encounters and OSCEs can be used, but ultimately skilled communication is needed in the setting of the workplace.
2. Feedback is a strong impetus for learning and preferably delivered in a reflective dialogue. For assessing complex skills such as communication, feedback in words is much more powerful than in scores.
3. Rather than trying to calibrate assessors to a single standard, it is preferred that assessors make their subjective impressions explicit. Having different perspectives on the same person being assessed is actually beneficial to learning and many subjective judgments deliver a robust picture on a learner.
4. With longitudinal attention to communication skills, technical communication skills become personalized and internalized over time and part of a clinical repertoire that is purposefully used to reach deliberate patient outcomes.
5. Complex skills are learned in a developmental and longitudinal way. Regular observation allows to detect certain patterns of communicative behavior.
6. High stake decisions on communication skills should be based on a lot of assessment data. Discussing all data in a group or in a (competence) committee strongly builds to the trustworthiness of the resulting decision.

References

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