

Fairness of Oral Assessment

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Assessment plays a crucial role in any curriculum. Oral assessment has long history in the certification process of medical education in most countries. Medical educators around the world have successfully used many different methods of assessing learners, both written and oral.¹ Oral assessment is a form of assessment, where a set of stimulus questions are developed that address critical areas of knowledge or sets of abilities related to a competency or set of competencies. In oral assessment, students are expected to respond verbally in their own words, which allow an assessment of student's depth of comprehension, and capacity to apply knowledge and insights to different situations.² Responses to the questions are assessed using a rating scale or scoring system. Oral assessment contains a high degree of flexibility; the teachers have possibility to choose and change the rules and procedure of assessment.² The complexity of oral assessment as an examination format raises concerns about its validity, reliability and fairness of its procedure for the award of certification after completion of a course. Validity "is the degree to which a test 'truly' measures what it is intended to measure" and it is the first priority of any assessment.³ On the other hand, reliability relates to consistency in measurement, that is, scores derived from a reliable assessment

tool are similar across assessment events.⁴ The oral assessment format facilitates instructors to test the student on all five domains of Bloom's taxonomy.⁵ To minimize the inconsistency and inequality of oral assessment among examiners, most authors suggested to develop a standardized format which have better validity and reliability, with less susceptibility to gender or cultural bias and to ensure its fairness as structured oral exam (SOE).⁶ They also suggested that examiners need to familiar with the new system in a short time training programme that favour to ensure homogenous scores among different raters. It is highly recommended to implement standards, benchmark, and performance indicators for effective oral assessment.⁷

Lastly, the development of assessment instruments that are valid, reliable and fair is not an easy task. This involves a process of lengthy discussions, modification, support and encouragement among the people engaged in the educational system, mainly, the administration, teachers, and students.

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