

## **Need for innovative assessments- Way to improve standard of medical education**

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According to the educationists, assessment plays a key role in determining the quality of student learning and should be a reward for integrated understanding, explanation and practice. Educators have advocated that assessment should be placed at the service of education as a process aiming to improve both learning and teaching process.

The basic format of most examinations prevailing in traditional medical colleges remain purely subjective and have led to gross dissatisfaction since they have been found to actually stifle deep learning and throttle creative thinking. Most educators favor the existing system of assessment as being successful but studies have shown that students perceive assessment to have a strong relation with the approach to learning and inappropriate assessment procedures encourage surface approaches [1]. Traditional assessment has detrimental effect on learning and forces the students to search information about “what the teacher wants” and frame study strategies that are tailor made [2]. This is where lies the importance of innovative assessment which can be defined as any form of assessment involving the application of a new technique. It may mean a whole range of different assessment techniques and methods all of which may not be new in the true sense. It may be modifications of the existing ones but the goal needs to be common: to improve the quality of student's learning. Since medical teaching is undergoing a tremendous paradigm shift from didactic lecturing to problem based and other forms of self directed learning, the assessment procedures also need to be modified in order to satisfy the need of the time. Also advent of computers and explosion of e information virtually demands more of the online testing processes rather than pen and paper testing of

three hour duration which is stressful and biased to a great extent. The best assessment instrument should yield valid accurate data that are consistent and therefore reliable in reproduction. It should also be feasible within the bounds of time training and equipment costs and applicable to the specific clinical circumstances being measured. And it should also provide useful information on the student's abilities as compared with the competencies being measured. Clinical competence being multidimensional, no single assessment tool is sufficient [3]. Therefore, multiple assessment tools should be used to evaluate the student's clinical and professional performance.

An innovative assessment tool box need to be constructed by the Medical Council of India in the lines of those created by the GMC, UK and AAMC, USA. Such tool boxes should give the guidelines as to how the question papers are to be set at each level of assessment in a four and a half year course of Indian medical schools. Even though different medical schools are affiliated to different Universities and different Universities have different standards, this will ensure a more or less similar standard in case of medical graduates. As the tool box will contain many strategies, a paper setter may be baffled as to what to choose. He needs to be aware of the psychometric qualities of the measuring device namely content validity relating to comprehensiveness, reliability relating to precision and score consistency and feasibility encompassing things like cost, logistics, time and personnel. Questions can be either Short answer types, Long answer types or Modified Essay types. For over 35 years multiple choice

questions have been used in the assessment of students in medical colleges in the United Kingdom, United States, Europe and Australia. We may use well structured MCQs by using a clinical vignette as the stem followed by analytical questions. This may demand a greater deal of analytical thinking [4] and also enable examiners to test integration of knowledge, problem solving skills and application of knowledge. Practical and clinical examinations should be properly structured so that examiner's bias and student's luck do not come in the way of grading of actual competency of the students. Though OSPE/OSCE have emerged as an useful instrument to measure skills, it still fails to be effective in assessing affective domain. Exercises may be devised where new instruments as portfolios, mini clinical evaluation exercises and 360' feedback are introduced [5]. These help to score on problem analysis, history taking, organization & efficiency, technical skills, interpersonal skills, team skills, educational and

research skills etc. Viva examinations have often been tagged as stressful for the students and criticized because of its low reliability and validity. In order to improve the quality and authenticity, steps need to be taken in a constructive fashion so that the oral examination is structured, grades are accountable and a proper assessment of other qualities like attitude and communication skills also get tested. The examiners must have a prior planning of the questions that he is going to ask the students by either preparing a question card having structured questions in such a manner that the standards remain same for each student and the level of difficulty is maintained in a gradual fashion.

Following the popular adage – “Assessment drives learning”, innovative assessment strategies need to be seriously looked into by the medical educators.

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