

ASSESSMENT STRATEGIES IN MEDICAL EDUCATION: MAKING CONTEXT-DRIVEN EVIDENCE-BASED DECISIONS

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While there are few answers in this world as unsatisfying as “it depends,” that is the right answer to the question of how one should assess the progress of learners in medical education. Over the years since medical education has evolved into a field of study in its own right the focus of assessment has expanded from determining how to assess one’s knowledge to how to assess a broad array of competencies including professionalism and patient advocacy. The focus has similarly expanded from determining how to assess one’s knowledge to how to assess one’s actual practice. Undoubtedly the focus will continue to expand in unanticipated directions, but even within the current scope of educational practice it is important to recognize that there is no one right way to assess learners. General criteria defining good assessment have been identified and a variety of assessment protocols appear to provide suitable fits to those criteria, but context is critically important in five ways: (1) It determines which compromises are appropriate when quality criteria oppose one another; (2) it influences assessee’s performance within the chosen assessment protocol; (3) it provides guidance as to which competencies should be prioritized; (4) it reminds us of the need to tailor our assessment protocols to the educational philosophy and curricular goals of the institution; and, (5) it determines the extent to which assessment protocols will be implemented in an effective manner. The goal of this workshop will be to provide the participant with guidance regarding what issues should be considered when striving to adapt existing assessment protocols (or to create innovative protocols) to the specific context of their own needs. It will begin by providing a brief summary of the criteria through which assessment protocols should be assessed and will subsequently present concrete examples of a variety of testing formats that emphasize various cognitive and contextual constraints on student assessment.