Beyond summative assessment of clinical performance in paramedic science

Nigel Barr (nbarr@usc.edu.au)
Faculty of Science, Health and Education, University of the Sunshine Coast

Kylie Readman* (kreadman@usc.edu.au)
Office of Learning and Teaching, University of the Sunshine Coast

Peter Dunn (pdunn2@usc.edu.au)
Faculty of Science, Health and Education, University of the Sunshine Coast

Paramedic programs present significant challenges in developing and assessing clinical performance. The Objective Structured Clinical Examination (OSCE) is typically used summatively to measure acquisition of clinical skills, declarative knowledge and scene control. To our knowledge formative use of the OSCE within paramedic science has not been reported in academic literature. A pilot research project undertaken at the University of the Sunshine Coast (USC) examined the effects of introducing formative OSCE assessment on students’ attainment of clinical skills and on their ability to critically reflect on their own practice and that of their peers.

The project changed the OSCE from a stand-alone summative assessment to include formative strategies embedded in the curriculum. These included the deconstruction and analysis of the OSCE assessment criteria prior to the task, peer and self-assessment on formative OSCE opportunities and students’ critical reflection on a video recording of their individual OSCE. These meta-cognitive activities were designed to encourage greater student understanding of and engagement with identifying and self-correcting skills that were to be summatively assessed.

The project used mixed methods to study the efficacy of formative assessment by developing OSCEs for learning and as learning (Earl, 2003) as well as for the traditional assessment of learning. Data collection was via self-administered online questionnaire, focus group interviews, and correlating self, peer and tutor assessment.

The preliminary results indicate that students perceive the inclusion of a number of formative assessment strategies improved their engagement with the course learning outcomes and understanding of the OSCE assessment, required deeper understanding of clinical skills and developed desired attributes of paramedic practitioners through a focus on active assessment and learning.

The outcomes of this study will add to the development of an evidence-based framework for teaching and assessing clinical competencies with paramedic students across Australia and the development of a signature pedagogy for paramedic education.

References


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*Corresponding author