

## Assessing Communication Skills: Frameworks, Validity, and Integration

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### Abstract

#### 1. Background:

It is imperative that physicians communicate effectively. Good communication is an essential component of healthcare and impacts positively patients and families, healthcare professionals, and healthcare systems. Educators and clinical supervisors therefore have the responsibility not only to teach communication skills to their trainees, but also to assess their progress and level of competence. Communication skill training has been the object of multiple, mostly descriptive studies across various disciplines.[1] Simulation and simulated patients mainly have been used to demonstrate its feasibility and effectiveness. In comparison, communication skill assessment has been remarkably understudied.[1]

The existing literature on communication skill assessment has failed to articulate a comprehensive framework useful to assess communication competencies across disciplines, to produce validity evidence for an assessment strategy transferrable to different contexts, and to address the complexity of communication skill assessment in real clinical environments.[2] Emerging evidence has just begun to explore who should assess trainees' communication skills (real patients, supervisors, expert raters)[3], but the need to further discuss and understand the what, when, where, and how of communication skill assessment is ongoing.

#### 2. Why is the topic important for research and / or practice?

As CBME and programmatic assessment are being adopted by an increasing number of training programs worldwide, assessment data about trainees' performance is being required to evaluate trainees' competence in different domains, including communication. Certain domains of competence, like procedural skills, appear to have been easier to integrate into programmatic assessment than others, such as communication skills, possibly because of a lack of understanding and evidence on how to assess these skills. Yet, ensuring excellent communication skills among their graduates is a key objective for all postgraduate programs.

#### 3. Workshop format, including participant engagement methods

##### Part 1: Existing and proposed frameworks to assess communication skills

Small group exercise: Discussion of existing frameworks guiding communication skill assessment.

Mini lecture & large group discussion: Discussion of a new framework

Part 2: Validity considerations

Small group exercise: Review of existing validity studies and gaps in communication assessment validity evidence

Mini lecture & large group discussion: Discussion of strategies to address gaps in validity evidence

Part 3: Considerations in integrating simulation-based assessments and workplace-based assessments

Mini lecture & large group discussion: Key factors to consider in SBA/WBA integrations

Small group exercise: Designing an assessment strategy including SBA/WBA for a specific communication activity.

3. Who should participate?

Supervisors, educators, program directors interested in communication assessment.

4. Level of workshop (beginner / intermediate / advanced)

Intermediate

5. Take-home messages / workshop outcomes / implications for further research or practice

By the end of this workshop, participants will be able to:

- a) Compare different frameworks to guide the design of communication assessment;
- b) Explain validity considerations in the assessment of communication skills;
- c) Describe productive strategies to integrate SBA and WBA for communication assessment.

6. Maximum number of participants: 40

**References (maximum three)**

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3. Khalife R, Gupta M, Gonsalves C, Park YS, Riddle J, Tekian A, Horsley T. Patient involvement in assessment of postgraduate medical learners: A scoping review. *Med Educ.* 2022 Jun;56(6):602-613. doi: 10.1111/medu.14726.