

## **How align do the teaching, practice and assessment of clinical communication skills?**

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### **Abstract**

Evidence indicates that communication skills teaching learnt in the classroom are not always applied in the clinical environment and assessment tasks. An observational study was conducted to objectively evaluate students' communication skills in different learning environments. The study sought to investigate (1) the extent to which the communication skills demonstrated by students in classroom, clinical, and assessment settings align; and (2) the extent to which communication skills practised in the classroom and clinical environment prepares students for the Objective Structured Clinical Examination (OSCE) assessment.

A mixed methods observational study was conducted to observe and evaluate students during the fourth year of a five-year medical program. Participants were video-recorded during structured classroom 'interactional skills' sessions, as well as clinical encounters with patients and an OSCE station calling upon communication skills. The Calgary Cambridge Communication Guide was used to evaluate students in different settings.

This study observed 28 students, and findings revealed that, while in the classroom, students were able to practise all communication skills tasks; in the clinical environment information-gathering and relationship-building with patients were the focus of their encounters. In the OSCEs, limited time and high-pressure scenarios caused the students to rush to complete the task, which focussed solely on information-gathering and/or explanation, diminishing the opportunity for rapport-building with the patient.

These findings indicate a poor alignment between the skills practised across learning environments. Further research is needed to investigate the development and application of students' skills over the long term to understand supports for and barriers to effective teaching and learning of communication skills in different learning environments.

### **References (maximum three)**

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