

Show me the way! Using EPAs in entry-level health professional education programs to create competency roadmaps for students.

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Abstract

Background

Recognised challenges to assessing student's competency across health programs include assessing clinical competency from preclinical to clinical phases, utilising programmatic assessment and creating shared mental models between assessors and students. EPAs have attracted global interest for their practicality, utility, and potential as 'assessment for learning'. However, an ongoing question is how to best utilise EPAs as part of a programmatic assessment suite. During the process of (re)developing several health professional programs at UNSW Sydney, we aimed to develop a practical method of utilising EPAs within a curriculum.

Methods

A small working group consisting of experienced academics, senior clinicians, recent graduates and educationalists from medicine and physiotherapy developed a new assessment approach through several rounds of discussion, refinement and consensus.

Results

A novel method was developed, utilising the expanded descriptions of EPAs to map clinical curriculums from the commencement of a program. Within expanded descriptions, micro-skills and knowledge domains that were required to perform an EPA could be identified, assessed and mapped. This created a series of data points that could be used to programmatically assess student's competency, enabling much clearer assessment 'for', 'as' and 'of' learning. By making this approach transparent to students and assessors throughout the program, a shared mental model was developed, creating a "roadmap" for students to develop into practitioners.

Conclusion

Substantial value and opportunity lie within the expanded descriptions of EPAs. Clearly identifying task specific knowledge and microskills in an EPA assessment framework may help address issues in competency development and assessment in health professions curricula.

Take home messages:

- EPAs are valuable tools to assess competency.
- Clear and complete EPA descriptions may enable improved curriculum mapping.
- Such approaches may assist to create a shared mental model between students and assessors and improve the utility of these assessments as a learning tool.

References (maximum three)

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