



Student Assessors for Practical Assessments on the Pharmacy Technician Higher Certificate Course

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In this case study, two academics on a pharmacy technician programme detail how structured practical and clinical assessments now involve student assessors in their 3rd year, offering an opportunity to further deepen their own clinical knowledge, while providing 1st year students with a chance to learn from their peers. The project details an invaluable methodology for increasing students' understanding of assessment and feedback so that they can contribute to and influence further change in assessment practices.

Introduction and Context

Objective structured practical and clinical examinations (OSPEs and OSCEs) are internationally recognised methods of assessing competency of healthcare students on courses such as medicine, pharmacy and pharmacy technician studies. They simulate potential real-life interactions with patients or other healthcare professionals.

In TUS Midlands (formally AIT), OSCEs have been a part of the syllabus for the higher certificate Pharmacy Technician course (year 1 and 2) since inception, assessing the student's ability to integrate knowledge, clinical skills, and communication with the patient. In year 1, the OSCE forms 20% of the overall mark in the Community Pharmacy Practice module. It is used to assess if learning outcomes have been met, in particular to: "Differentiate and outline the outcomes of 'Responding to Symptoms' as presented in any community pharmacy."

Students of the BSc 3rd year Pharmacy Technician course have already undertaken these practical evaluations during their own studies and are currently in pharmacy employment. Therefore, they have gained expertise in the precise types of pharmacy scenarios that first year students are being assessed on, making them well-equipped to act as assessors in the OSCE.

Having 3rd year students involved in the assessment process for the 1st years allows them to display their competence as qualified pharmacy technicians, gain insight into the practical running of OSCEs and develop assessor skills which they may use in the future. They also form a partnership with academic staff, and provide invaluable support in the smooth running of an assessment which traditionally requires a large number of staff to run effectively. The 3rd year student contributes to the final discussion before the examination begins. In this final discussion the 3rd years can advise us if we need to consider adjustments, additions or removals.

This information can be immediately enacted and also noted for future OSCE's going forward. Even though the stations have been previously validated a timeline has passed and as these students are currently working in pharmacy their knowledge is paramount to the successful running of these exams.

Having the 3rd years involved in this way is an educational experience, which allows them to use their autonomy and skillset in a way that differs from their other forms of learning on the course.

Project Outline

OSCEs were initially developed in Dundee in the early 1970s by Professor Harden and colleaguesⁱ and are now used in over 50 countries. They form a component of numerous professional registration processes internationally, including that of pharmacy technicians in Canada.ⁱⁱ

OSCEs sit in the "Shows How" level of Miller's Pyramid of Clinical Assessmentⁱⁱⁱ as they allow trainee pharmacy technicians to demonstrate that they can act independently to deal with customer queries in a safe and polite manner, providing healthcare advice or referring customers to seek further medical advice if needed.

The 1st year Community Pharmacy Practice OSCE was initially developed by D. Patterson and colleagues of the Pharmacy Technician courses using a standardised approach as follows:

- Define the purpose of each station
- Candidate instructions
- Scoring checklist, binary grade used
- Standardised patient instructions
- Instruction for station set-up

The purpose of each station in the OSCE was defined by the skill and domain to be tested e.g. customer counselling for a new inhaler.

The marking scheme uses a binary method (2: achieved, 1: partially, 0: not achieved) to mark each step in the pre-designed marking scheme.

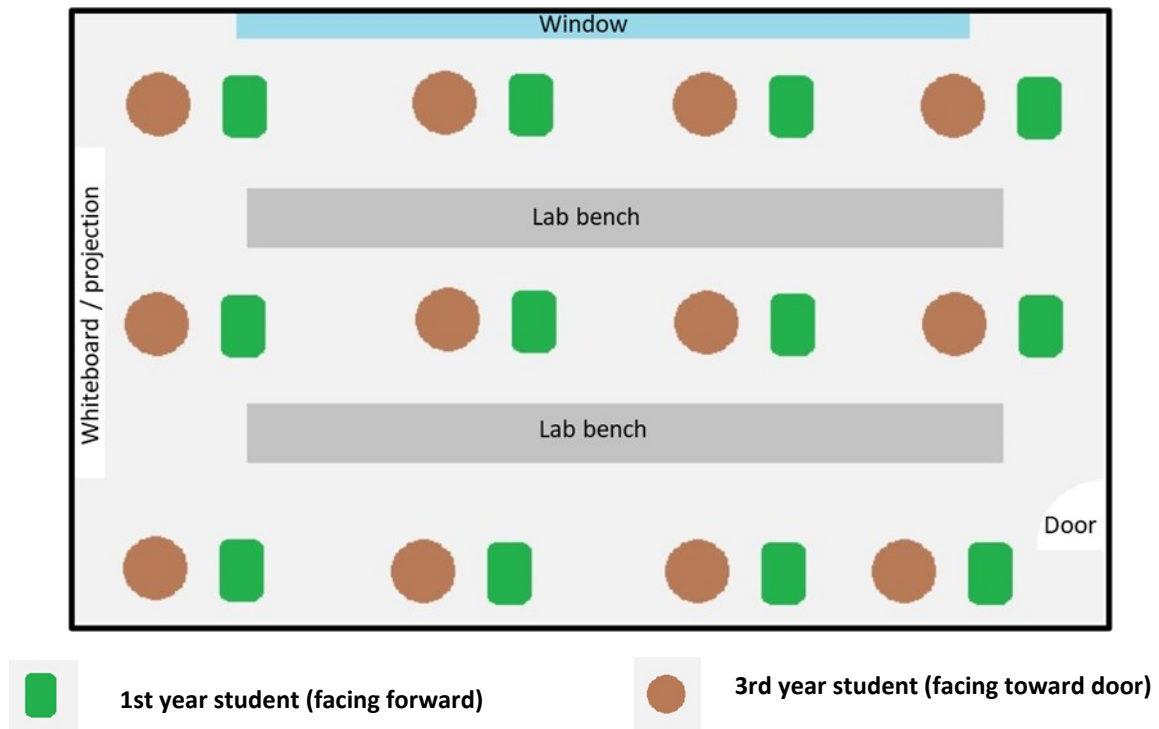
The ratio of the marks is dependent on the outcome required (e.g. advising patient not to use Wartner[®] if diabetic, 4 marks: achieved if explicitly confirms patient is not diabetic, 2 mark: if the student only ask if on any other medication).

Project Action Plan

Action	Brief Description
Invitation to 3rd year students	3 rd year students are invited to partake in the 1 st year OSCEs. This is a voluntary role, and the benefits of partaking (professional growth, assessor experience) are highlighted. The OSCE day is set and 3 rd year students are given a time to arrive. Prior to the examination day the 3 rd year student receives a presentation on the process of designing OSCE stations, the marking scheme, professional performance rubric. They are given some sample stations to review and feedback on. This is a very valuable exercise.

<p>Arrival on OSCE day & Briefing</p>	<p>3rd year students arrive at the arranged time, before the OSCEs are due to commence. Each 3rd year student is assigned a scenario to act out or an assessment sheet to mark. The 3rd year student is provided with a script, marking sheet, and professional score rubric previously designed and checked by the team of pharmacist at TUS.</p> <p>The 3rd year students are briefed on their scenarios by a supervisor, the scenario is role-played, grading is explained and any questions are answered. This step is very valuable as the actors and assessors can decide on how to react to a question if asked, the vulnerability of the process doesn't allow for the range of questions that a student may feel is appropriate having interrupting the scenario completely wrong or indifferent to the pharmacists setting the stations. At this stage of their learning, they are only approaching the novice stage of expertise. During this briefing and practice role-play, all 3rd year students and coordinators check that the instructions are detailed enough, edit them based on the 3rd year feedback so to ensure the standardised patient (3rd year student) can play the same role.</p> <p>This feedback is extremely valuable as it can be actioned upon going forward.</p> <p>The 3rd year student will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> play the part of a standardised patient who has come to the pharmacy looking for assistance with an ailment. They will use their script to ensure uniformity of information provided to the 1st year student who then must decide on how to respond OR assess the student using the pre-determined marking scheme <p>3rd year students are assigned to their position and once in place, the 1st year students are called in to commence.</p>
<p>OSCE Assessment</p>	<p>Each 1st year student has 7 minutes to complete each station before a bell rings to indicate it is time to move to the next station. The 3rd year students stay in the same place for the whole OSCE.</p> <p>3rd year students completing the assessment part of the exam document their name, and the name of the 1st year student they are assessing on the marking sheet. Using the marking sheet they have been provided with they will assess if the 1st year student has completed each part of the task adequately or inadequately and a pre-defined mark is assigned for each section e.g. the student checked if the patient has any allergies.</p> <p>As well as an itemised marking scheme, there is also a professional score which the 3rd years independently assign to each student based on how they felt the student interaction went. They are provided with a professional score rubric to aid them in their decision on this section.</p> <p>At the end of the 7 minute station, the 3rd year student will have time to make any additional notes while the next 1st year students are taking their seats. Completed marking sheets are collected by the OSCE supervisor.</p>
<p>End of OSCE feedback</p>	<p>Once the 1st years have completed all OSCE stations and have left the room, the 3rd year students gather with the OSCE staff and ensure all paperwork has been collected. They provide general feedback and highlight any queries they had with the station/overall assessment.</p>

Image 1: Example lay-out of pharmacy lab for 1st year community pharmacy practice OSCE



Reflections on Student Engagement

Participation

Positive outcomes can continually be seen from the engagement of 3rd years in the OSCE assessments, firstly from their willingness to partake – each year a high proportion of 3rd year students arrive to voluntarily take part in the OSCEs. Being “on the other side” of assessments can empower the students, and is a reminder of their achievements in their studies so far. They contribute to the validation process by offering feedback during the course of the examination process.

Empathy

“The experience is daunting for 1st years”

The 3rd year students have empathy and understanding for 1st year students on the OSCE day, having gone through the same type of assessment themselves. While committing to a fair and formal examination process, the 3rd years also aim to put 1st years at ease, and direct observation of their interactions showed warm introductions and departing wishes of good luck between students.

Proficiency

The 3rd year students are proficient at grading and documentation of the 1st year performances. Time is taken at the end of the OSCE to ensure all marking sheets are completed, and students have taken the opportunity to provide additional information to staff on the day if they feel it is necessary e.g. if a student gave a piece of good advice during a station and there was no specific place to document it on the marking sheet.

Future feedback

While having the opportunity to provide feedback on the stations on the day is beneficial, a formalised opportunity for 1st years and 3rd years to comment on the experience may highlight areas for improvement. For example, is

there anything which may have made the scenario run more smoothly? How did students (1st years as examinees and 3rd years as examiners) find the layout of the room, was it quiet enough, could they overhear other consultations and if so were these distracting? Future plans for the OSCE process may include a questionnaire / anonymous feedback portal for students to share their experiences.

Reference List

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