

In order to begin to develop a shared language one of the groups discussed 'what is an OSCE' and 'what is a station'. A lively and interesting discussion ensued and the following points were agreed.

What is an OSCE?

- OSCE is an overall term used to describe a practical exam that comprises 1 or more stations (see below) and takes place in simulated practice setting.
- Prior to the OSCE Students are informed about the skills that could be included or may be told exactly what will be included.
- The focus is on practical skills but it also includes interpersonal skills and communication skills.
- The marking criteria, which usually involve checklists, are agreed in advance. Students may have access to checklists prior to the exam. Checklists are used to provide feedback to students on their performance.
- The checklists reflect best practice. They need to be agreed in advance and often have to be scrutinised by University Assessment Boards in the same way as other types of assessment.
- Checklists identify essential or safety criteria and the minimum acceptable standard is safety
- The assessors in OSCEs are usually lecturers and they need training in order to ensure equity and fairness in the OSCE.

What is a Station?

- A station is time-limited 'test' of one or more aspects of practice. These are aspects of practice that a student at that level is expected to be able to achieve/perform in that time.
- The marking may be pass/fail with qualitative feedback for the student or each item on the checklist may be allocated marks, which are then totalled. The checklist may include 'sudden death' items i.e. items that will trigger a fail grade if not achieved/completed. If the system of marking includes grades (e.g. good, satisfactory, borderline pass and fail) 'borderline pass' represents the minimal acceptable standard, which usually refers to safety.
- The station includes tasks/skills that can be completed in a reasonable time.
- Some universities identify the time left at the end if the student finishes the station early. This may show the student is quick but efficient but also means that students who finish early but fail cannot then say that they did not have sufficient time.

Questions

How do we/should we prepare students for the practice theory gap?