



Rapid transition to online assessment: Practical steps and unanticipated advantages

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Background

The coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic has required a paradigmatic shift in the delivery of medical education. By necessity web-based learning has been widely adopted by medical educators to deliver content. Surrogate approaches to assessment have been less intuitive and must follow quickly.

What we tried

Students' competence was assessed in interviewing, clinical reasoning, supporting patient emotion, counselling, explanation of diagnostic test results, and oral and written presentation. Three standardised patient (SP) encounters, mapped to expected clinical competencies, were developed and administered through a telehealth format in Zoom™. Students self-assessed their written presentations using exemplar notes.

How did we evaluate it?

Students completed the NBME Comprehensive Basic Science Self-Assessment. The digital format allowed measurement of nearly all clinical competencies

What did we find?

Faculty member, student and SP satisfaction with the fidelity of cases and overall assessment quality were high. Removing physical infrastructure barriers (suitable rooms) expanded capacity for simultaneous assessment of learners by 50%. Eliminating distance, transportation and physical ability barriers offered advantages beyond efficiency, including increased SP diversity and lower programmatic costs. Telephone cases allowed flexibility in SP demographics as well as preserving clinical fidelity.

Conclusion

A fully digital year-end comprehensive assessment provided a rich and impactful formative assessment during a time of disruption, and modifications made by necessity created unexpected advantages

What main lessons did we learn?

- Deliberate strategies to optimise the digital learning environment were necessary, including video orientation, written instructions, daily Zoom 'office hours,' team huddles and consistent communication with students
- The opportunity to participate remotely facilitated faculty member recruitment