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Objective structured practical examination (OSPE) as part of the Occupational Therapy education in Switzerland

Brunhilde Matter, Adam Josef, Aegler Barbara

Zürcher Hochschule für angewandte Wissenschaft (ZHAW), Zürich, Switzerland

The objective structured clinical examination (OSCE) was introduced in 1975 (Petruša, 2002) as a reliable approach to assessing basic clinical skills and is widely used and researched in medical education (Mazor, 2005, Val Wass, 2001, Van der Vleuten, 1996). It is a test format based on a circuit of client based clinical situations.

In the OSCE students are rated at the competence level of "shows how" rather than at the lower levels of "knows" or "knows how" (Miller, 1990).

At the University of Applied Science Zurich, Switzerland, in the three years Bachelor of Science program of Occupational therapy a problem based learning (PBL) curriculum is applied. For the last semester the goal was to applying the occupational therapy theories and models to the treatment of complex client situations including different cultural backgrounds. In 2009, the module coordinators decided to assess the two modules "complex clients situations" and "occupational therapy theory and models" with an objective structured practical examination (OSPE) consistent with the PBL teaching and comparable to an OSCE. It seemed important to test the student's ability to integrate theory and practice skills and to assess student's knowledge, skills and attitudes that means the students occupational performance with clients. The examination was blueprinted from the curriculum (Smee, 2005, Val Wass, 2001)) covering the different areas of OT practise and occupational therapy theory and models.

Nine different scenarios combined with tasks of evaluation, intervention, outcome and communication were developed, simulating an OT professional environment with standardised clients or occupational therapy team members, performed by trained lay actors. An examination expert in each of the stations scored the 72 students according to a criteria-based rating sheet (Petruša, 2002).

The validity and reliability of the SPE were evaluated. First results of the two carrying outs and consequences for further examinations are outlined in the presentation.