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Tell Me. Show Me. The use of OSCE in the assessment of nurses

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The nursing curriculum at Middlesex University has undergone a comprehensive change in curriculum design and delivery driven by policy measures. Nursing students are now educated to graduate level and as such are required to be competent in nursing assessment and clinical decision making; two areas integral to the delivery of quality nursing care. For some time now Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) have recognised the need to move away from surface learning (lower order skills, such as retention of knowledge and understanding of content) and to develop higher order skills such as analysis, synthesis and evaluation. Changes to our methods of assessment provide a better opportunity to test these skills. The Objective Structured Clinical Examination (OSCE) assessment tool also permits the testing of the student's application of knowledge into the 'real world' of nursing practice; level of understanding; attitudes; decision making; communication and critical thinking skills. All are core characteristics of a professional nurse. Student learning is often driven by their assessments and they may learn little beyond the context of these assessments. The OSCE aims to assess primary and related aspects of nursing – to facilitate the students to understand the broader contexts of nursing. The changes have included the introduction of the OSCE as the primary assessment method for a number of nursing modules across the pre and post registration curriculum. Distinct changes have been introduced in the OSCE format order to take into account the specific skills being considered, as well as the extensive planning involved. This concept of the OSCE links well with the theme of creative assessments in that it enables the assessment of more than one specific domain in an innovative way, moving away from the rigidity of traditional assessment approaches. In addition this form of assessment process can be easily adopted by other practice based disciplines as an innovative way in which to assess individual student's level of knowledge, understanding decision making and psychomotor skills. OSCE's are marked according to transparent criteria and are designed to allow the evaluation of clinical and theoretical knowledge and professional skills. Modern education is not simply a transfer of information. It is the imparting of a complex set of skills, behaviours and attitudes which when absorbed and interpreted by the student, form the base of their personal and professional practice. Graduates should be able to demonstrate professional behaviour and critical thinking skills that result in them being employable. Evaluating the result of this work is equally challenging - few exams are designed to assess the range of competencies needed to become competent professionals. Quality assured OSCE's are found to be a trustworthy and applicable way of assessing capability and proficiency. The process is designed to be flexible and addresses multiple skill sets such as communication, organisation, planning and evaluation of tasks. The unique advantages of OSCEs are that academics have the chance to work closely with stakeholders in assessing students; and students have the opportunity to demonstrate expertise in practical as well as theoretical competencies.

Biography

Tina Moore is a Senior Lecturer (University Teaching Fellow) in Adult and Post-graduate Nursing at Middlesex University. Her pedagogic interests include assessments within clinical practice and simulation.

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