



## OSCE Adapted for Social Work

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**Objective Structured Clinical Examination (OSCE)** stands for:

- **Objective:** Skills directly observed by a rater who does not have a relationship with the student
- **Structured:** A set scenario and format
- **Clinical:** Assesses practice skill
- **Exam:** Performance is evaluated on a set scale resulting in an assessment of student competence.

**An OSCE Consists of:**

- an interview of specific duration (5-15minutes) conducted by a student with a standardized client directly assessed by an assessor using a rating scale
- standardized clients are actors trained to enact a particular scenario in the role of a client, consistently each time
- students conducting one or more interviews, moving through a series of scenarios (also called stations) representing areas of practice
- scenarios where the student is observed and his/her performance is rated on a scale designed as a checklist of behaviors or a series of more general or global practice processes.

### Current status and research support in health professions

Originated in medicine (Harden, Stevenson, Downie, & Wilson, 1975; Harden & Gleeson, 1979) to:

- assess knowledge, clinical skills, and how knowledge is *used in practice*
- provide a standardized, fair, and equitable method of assessment in contrast to the variability of client, problem, and preceptor/assessor in the clinical setting
- provide a reliable and valid assessment approach.

Extensive research literature on OSCE method over the past three decades finds (Hodges, 2006):

- acceptable validity and reliability, is accepted by students and faculty members
- used frequently for episodic performance-based assessment in undergraduate medical education, specialty areas, and in licensing examinations in some countries, including Canada.

## Adapted for Social Work

### *Why needed in social work*

Challenges to reliable and valid evaluation of student learning due to:

- intensity of student-field instructor relationship (Bogo et al., 2007)
- variability in agency context, complexity of client situations, nature of field instruction
- variability of practice data used to arrive at evaluation with heavy reliance on verbal or written self-report of practice rather than direct observation or use of video records (Maidment, 2000)
- tendency for grade inflation in field evaluations (Regehr, Bogo et al, 2007; Sowbel, 2011)
- responsibility of the educational program to directly assess students' practice competence rather than such assessments only taking place in field settings.

### *The nature of competence*

Holistic competence consists of two inter-related components: 1) performance of complex behaviors based on an integration of knowledge, values, and skills; and 2) critical thinking, decision-making and judgment, and self-awareness underpinning practice (Bogo & Regehr, et al., 2006; Cheetham & Chivers, 2005). Therefore an examination is needed which assesses these two components.

### *Empirical support for OSCE in social work*

Although systematic study of the use of client simulations is limited (Logie et al., in press) recently there is growing interest in testing the use of OSCE in social. Rawlings (2008) used standardized scales with high internal reliability to compare students entering and exiting an undergraduate program on their performance of a one scenario OSCE where the client was dealing with grief issues. The study found mean scores on performance and self-efficacy were significantly higher for students exiting the program than for those entering. Lu and colleagues (2011) used an OSCE to assess graduate students' practice skills in clinical competence and cultural sensitivity after completing a one semester course on clinical practice with diverse populations. The checklist developed and tested for the study demonstrated high internal reliability.

A SSHRC funded research study conducted at the Factor-Inwentash Faculty of Social Work, tested a 5 scenario OSCE adapted for social work including a performance rating scale, a reflective dialogue, and a reflection rating scale. Testing with social work students, recent graduates, and experienced practitioners demonstrated high internal consistency for the scales, moderate reliability across the five stations, and construct validity in that experienced workers were rated significantly higher than students (Bogo et al., 2011a, b).

### *Components of the OSCE*

#### **1. 15 minute interview to assess performance of practice behavior:**

- expected of a student at the completion of the Elements/Lab courses at the end of the first semester, Year 1 of the Masters Program
- in the first 15 minutes of a 1 hour interview
- behaviors associated with competence in:
  - developing a collaborative relationship
  - conducting an eco-systemic assessment
  - setting the stage for collaborative goal setting

- demonstrating cultural competence

Raters use a performance rating scale to rate students' behaviors on a 5 point scale with descriptors for each level.

## **2. 15 minute guided and structured reflection to assess students' integration of key social work concepts.**

Reflection consists of a structured set of questions to elicit students' impressions and critical thinking about their own performance and to assess the way in which students:

- conceptualize practice, i.e., use knowledge and critical thinking to understand the practice situation, how/why to intervene, and integrate concepts related to diversity
- use self in an intentional manner including self-awareness and self-regulation
- assess their performance in the interview with implications for their future learning as a professional.

Raters use a reflective dialogue rating scale to rate students' reflections along a 5 point scale with descriptors for each level.

## **OSCE adapted for use in a Social Work Practice Laboratory**

This OSCE method provides a standardized method to evaluate student learning, using standardized patients/clients, a standardized format for reflection, and two ratings scales. Given resource issues all students in a Credit/No Credit course are evaluated on a number of evaluation activities, one of which is an interview role play with a fellow student followed by a written reflective analysis at mid-term. The final assignment is a one-station 15 minute interview with a standardized client rated by an instructor in the course other than the student's instructor. The method is adapted as follows:

- Each student conducts one interview with a standardized client.
- Following the interview the student receives immediate feedback from the trained actor/clients.
- The student then spends 20 minutes in the computer lab and completes a written reflection guided by a structured set of questions. The reflection is evaluated by the rater who observed the interview using the standardized reflection rating scale.
- Performance and reflection ratings of each student on the OSCE is forwarded to the student's course instructor who incorporates this information in written feedback to the student as part of the overall evaluation in the course.

A study of the relationship between student scores on the OSCE and the field practicum is underway.

## **Use of OSCE for the Year 1 Field Practicum**

To provide continuity in the student's development of competencies in practice the program or the students can be expected or encouraged to share the written feedback they received from their lab course instructor. This information can be incorporated in planning the practicum and used as a baseline. Learning strategies can be identified to focus on specific competencies for development.

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