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A Medline station in the clerkship clinical skills exam

Donna O’Malley, MSLIS
Dana Medical Library, University of Vermont, Burlington, Vermont

Objective

The UVM College of Medicine’s clerkship curriculum includes hundreds of learning objectives divided into several themes and topics. Although the curriculum has no explicit evidence-based thread, two objectives in the areas of communication and clinical decision-making encompass the classic EBM skills:

- PERFORM database searches for patient or disease specific information.
- DIFFERENTIATE between practices that are based upon different strengths of evidence for effectiveness.

What are the benefits and drawbacks of using a clinical skills exam workstation to evaluate student mastery of these two objectives?

Methods

Development of the Medline Station of the Clinical Skills Exam workstation began in 2001, subtly in the College’s use of the clinical performance exam format for drill evaluation (then referred to as: Objective Structured Clinical Examinations or OSCEs). Clerkship and library faculty realized that database search and article evaluation skills could be more objectively assessed using the same format.

Librarians and clinicians worked together to create a paper case scenario for students to use in generating a clinical question, performing a search to address the question, and retrieving an article to evaluate in pursuit of an answer to the question. An assessment rubric was also developed.

Results

2001, 2002

- Thought process required by the paper case was too advanced.
- Didn’t differentiate between patient’s question and their own questions.
- Good clinical questions were not always the one to the rubric.
- Searchers didn’t address clinical questions; students didn’t understand why they were formulating a question.
- Limits were not used. Students complained that the librarian-led instruction earlier in the clerkship was unnecessary.
- Both PubMed and Ovid were used.
- Full text rarely accessed (purposely because it was usually not available).
- Articles rarely cited with enough information to locate them again.
- Ran out of time before evaluating the quality of an article.

2005

Changes to the case:
- More straightforward than the old case.
- Case topic could only be addressed by the most up to date literature, i.e. Medline.

Changes in instruction:
- Lecture on limits on why and how to ask a clinical question added to the clerkship.
- Librarian-led instruction in searching moved from clerkship to an earlier point in the curriculum.

Changes in the rubric:
- More heavy in the content of the clinical question.
- Assessed on either PubMed or Ovid search skills.
- Required citing of articles.
- Assessed on knowledge beyond Type and Go in PubMed. In Ovid assessed on searching one strategy, and evaluation of sources used, and competed the assessment rubric.

Discussion

Currently, the Medline Station cannot be used for summative assessment of individual students. Though we have some evidence of interrater reliability, based on similar results obtained in Maine and with both raters in Vermont, we have not formally assessed interrater reliability or validity.

The Medline Station is a powerful tool for evaluating and remediation of the curriculum itself. Since the grading rubric was developed with the Director of the Clerkship Program, when students fail as a group at any of the components, she is motivated to improve their skills. This collaboration has resulted in an improved curriculum in Evidence-Based Medicine.

However, reviewing the grading rubric with other Clerkship faculty has revealed a disconnect in our curriculum. Faculty who teach in the pre-clinical years believe that students should be able to evaluate the primary literature, and that the two-week class at the beginning of medical school covers that skill. Clerkship faculty believe that medical students are not yet ready to use the primary literature in the clerkship, concluding that perhaps EBM is a fourth-year skill. The curriculum does not yet have an EBM component in the fourth year.

In addition to its importance in assessing the curriculum, the Medline Station allows every student to meet individually with a librarian during the clerkship year. The experience has allowed librarians to provide individualized instruction and develop a deeper relationship with each student.

Bibliography


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For further information

Please contact donna.omalley@uvm.edu

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