ASSESSING DIAGNOSTIC RADIOGRAPHY STUDENTS’ CLINICAL COMMUNICATION SKILLS

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Background

- Excellent communication skills are essential in establishing and maintaining effective relationships between a diagnostic radiographer and their patient

- These communication skills have numerous patient benefits  
  (Johnson et al, 2013; Reinders et al 2010)

- Clinical experience with patients plays a large role in the education of allied health students  
  (Bridge et al, 2014; Towle et al 2010)
Diagnostic Radiography Programs

- 2 professional entry programs:

1. 4 year undergraduate program

2. 2 year Graduate Entry Masters (GEM) program

- Both of these programs lead to registration as a diagnostic radiographer with the Medical Radiation Practice Board of Australia (MRPBA)
Assessment of Communication Skills in GEM program

- Assessment of students’ foundational communication skills in Year 1, Week 5 of the program
- Occurs prior to the student commencing clinical placement
- Assesses following 3 elements:
  1. oral communication skills
  2. non-verbal communication skills and ability to identify cues from patient
  3. written communication skills
- Aim of assessment is to identify students who are experiencing difficulties effectively communicating with patients before the commencement of placement.
- Need to ensure students are able to practice safely.
Assessment of Communication Skills in GEM program

Communication Skills Video:

- In 2015, 80 students submitted a 4 minute video of themselves acting as a radiographer and obtaining a clinical history from a patient

- Students participated in 2 x 2 hour clinical classes focusing on foundational communication skills before attempting the video

- All students were provided with:
  - Patient request form
  - Clinical history form (containing prompts of questions to ask)
  - Marking rubric
Assessment of Communication Skills in GEM program

Communication Skills Video:

- Students were asked to watch the video prior to submission, complete the marking rubric and write a 1 page reflective piece regarding their communication skills

Challenges:

- Not an ‘authentic’ assessment
- Students were able to practice this skill an unlimited number of times before submission
- Students were able to formulate their own script of patient responses
- Large number of videos to mark – difficult to identify students with communication difficulties before commencement of placement
- Students who presented as having satisfactory communication skills were often still struggling and failed this component on placement
Assessment of Communication Skills in GEM program

Communication Skills Video:

- Challenges:
  - Unable to provide students with timely feedback before the commencement of clinical, which may have contributed to students’ difficulties in developing communication skills
  - In 2015 Unit of Study Evaluation (USE), students expressed dissatisfaction with this assessment task. Comments were that they felt it was not an effective way of assessing their communication skills
Assessment of Communication Skills in GEM program

Solution?

- Assessment task was re-designed for use in Semester 1, 2016

- Aim: to assess students’ communication skills in a ‘real time’ setting, ensuring fitness to practice this component of radiography safely in the clinical setting

- Design of an oral viva examination, which has been reported in the literature as being able to provide information regarding a student’s knowledge, problem solving skills interpretive ability (Davis et al, 2005)

- Assessing a students’ ability to obtain a clinical history from a simulated patient utilising a set template of questions
Assessment of Communication Skills in GEM program

Oral Viva Examination

- Students were provided with the same 2 x 2 hour clinical classes focusing on foundational communication skills

- All students were provided with:
  - ✔ Patient request form
  - ✔ Clinical history form (containing prompts of questions to ask)
  - ✔ Revised marking rubric
Assessment of Communication Skills in GEM students

Oral Viva Examination

- Students were allocated to a 10 minute time slot (n=76 students)

- During this time, students needed to establish a rapport with their patient in order to obtain a clinical history and record information accurately on the clinical history form

- Completed clinical history form was submitted to the examiner at the conclusion of the examination
Assessment of Communication Skills in GEM students

Oral Viva Examination

- The simulated patient was an MRS trained academic

- Received training on the role and expectation of a simulated patient

- To ensure fairness and equity for students, all simulated patients were provided with a standardised list of answers to the questions asked by students

- Actors were instructed to only answer the questions asked by the students – don’t provide additional information without being specifically asked
Assessment of Communication Skills in GEM students

Oral Viva Examination

- The simulated patient in this scenario was also the examiner and provided a written assessment of the student’s skills at the conclusion of the examination (once the student had left the room).

- At the conclusion of all examinations, an examiners meeting occurred and grades were discussed, particularly those of borderline or failing students.

- UoS Coordinator reviewed all scores again, particularly to examine marking patterns between examiners.
Assessment of Communication Skills in GEM students

Oral Viva Examination

- The oral viva examination was completed on Wednesday of week 5, with students receiving their individual score, completed marking rubric and detailed feedback regarding their performance on Friday of week 5.

- This allowed students to receive timely, specific feedback which could be used to assist in further developing their communication skills on placement (placement commenced Wednesday week 6)

- Of the 76 students assessed, 2 students were found to be borderline and 2 students failed the oral viva examination.

- Students who failed were blocked from commencing clinical placement and undertook a remedial program
Assessment of Communication Skills in GEM students

Oral Viva Examination

- **Benefits:**
  - ✓ Provision of timely, specific feedback to students
  - ✓ Higher student satisfaction scores were recorded in the USE in both the quantitative and qualitative measures
  - ✓ Higher probability of identifying students experiencing difficulty with communication before the commencement of placement
  - ✓ Our theory was that this would lead to a higher standard of patient care being delivered by students on their first clinical placement in the area of communication
Assessment of Communication Skills in GEM students

Oral Viva Examination

- Challenges:
  - Scheduling of examinations in a limited time period
  - Having the examiner also play the part of the simulated patient
  - Ensuring consistency between simulated patients. Qualitative comments recorded on the USE described the frustration from some students at the lack of consistency between simulated patients. Students commented that there was one examiner who played the role of patient more ‘harshly’ which made it more difficult for that group to score as well as other students
Assessment of Communication Skills in GEM students

Next Steps

- We will be continuing with the model of using an oral viva examination to assess student’s foundational communication skills

- Further work needs to be conducted to ensure greater consistency between examiners when assessing the student’s communication skills

- Need to explore the potential for using trained simulated actors in the oral viva examination to act as patients. Difficulties associated with this include cost and time for training, and a limited pool of available actors
References


