

CATEGORY 3 POSTER WINNER

A SCENARIO-BASED, COMPUTER-ADMINISTERED METHOD OF ASSESSMENT IN ETHICS

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BACKGROUND:

Ethical issues occur in every aspect of medical practice and influence the clinical decisions which are made. Ethical decisions may be made at a number of levels. Firstly, the 'gut reaction' to a particular question; second *rules* may be applied; thirdly there may be a need to consider the *principles* upon which the rules are based, or a need to decide which rules apply; and, finally, at a deeper level *basic convictions* may influence perception of the situation. Assessment of undergraduate medical students is often focused on knowledge of ethical theories, often by multiple choice questions, or professional behaviours as demonstrated in objective structured clinical examinations. Less attention is paid to the process of ethical reasoning.

STUDY:

This was a qualitative, proof-of-concept study to assess the practicability and validity of an on-line assessment in medical ethics. Three clinical scenarios with significant ethical issues, including end of life care, resuscitation capacity assessment and confidentiality were developed. These formed the basis for structured questions to be written using QuestionMark software. These scenarios allowed students to work through clinical ethical problems with the story unfolding as they proceed (see figure below) This allowed assessment of the decision making process as well as the decision reached. The program allowed for in assessment feedback to the student. A purposive sample was sought from the medical students sitting the examinations at this time. Participation was on a voluntary basis. Feedback was collected in the form of a short questionnaire at the end of the e-learning session and also from focus groups. The scenarios were also shown to the teaching staff and feedback was taken by means of semi-structured interviews as individuals and in small groups. Thematic analysis was performed.

RESULTS:

Feedback from students was positive: they liked the way the scenarios unfolded, and felt that it mirrored real life decision making. They felt that the process was educational and highlighted the ethical issues at stake. Some even stated that they had enjoyed the exercise. Faculty also thought the system had potential, particularly for formative assessment. However developing questions was recognised to be time consuming.

CONCLUSIONS:

As a proof of concept study this was successful. The online assessment was workable but would require validation and comparison with the existing assessments.

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