

## Practicum and Clinical

**Description** In professional skill courses involving lab or clinical work, use and control of equipment, or the development of physical dexterity and psychomotor skills, it is obviously necessary to assess this work through practical tests of some sort. There are two general approaches to assessing practical skills:

1. Ongoing observation is best for courses with practical or psychomotor skills making up most of the intended learning outcomes, e.g., Culinary Arts, Performing Arts, Studio Arts, Clinical Skills courses, and so on. By assessing each performance or product, you can get a better overall view of the student's performance and ability. Furthermore, timely feedback can be given on the spot for improvement purposes. Whenever possible, this type of continuous formative-to-summative assessment is the best for practical skills courses.
2. Summative demonstration is a demonstration of practical skills to an examiner. In many ways this is similar to the closed-book written exam, except for the fact that it is of a practical nature. This form of assessment can be unfair to students who may have a 'bad day', or to those who react badly to exam pressures but are otherwise competent performers. However, many vocational qualifications require this type of competency testing and students will need to be prepared.

### **Example 1** *Clinical Procedures Demonstration*

To complete your clinical requirements you will demonstrate at least 3 successful experiences in a hospital setting with 5 procedures: (1) venipuncture; (2) arterial puncture; (3) bladder cath of male and female; (4) suturing/ wound care; and (5) intravenous lines. Submit completed log forms with signature and comments of the supervising nurse or doctor.

### **Example 2** *Physical Assessment Demonstration*

Your final practical exam is a 30-minute physical assessment demonstration. Bring your own patient for this demonstration and arrive 10 minutes before your scheduled exam time. You will be required to perform abdominal, thorax/lung, and cardiovascular exam. In addition you will perform a fourth exam chosen randomly by the examiner. Possible choices include musculoskeletal exam, neurological exam, eye exam, or head/ ear/ nose/ throat/ neck exam. The criteria for performance are attached. Please use them to study and practice before the exam. You are not permitted to refer to them during the exam.

### **Example 3** *Clinical Skills Demonstration with Explanation* (this is a variation of Examples 1 and 2.)

Perform the Clinical Procedure/Physical Assessment Demonstration. As you are performing each step in the procedure, explain to the supervisor/ examiner (1) what you are about to do (2) why you are doing what you will be doing (3) answer any question from your supervisor/ examiner.

**What Outcomes** • Both Examples 1 and 2 are designed to measure mostly *procedural*

**are Assessed?**

knowledge – it is primarily a matter of getting the sequences and actions right based on the given criteria. The assessments themselves do not measure *functioning* knowledge of patient care, which is primarily *performance with understanding*.

- Example 3 includes an explanation component to the demonstration. This ‘running commentary’ will expose the thinking behind the action and will allow the examiner to assess the *reasoning* ability of the student

**How Authentic is the Task?**

- Obviously, Example 1 is far more authentic than Example 2. The student works on real patients in an actual hospital or clinic. S/he is assessed by a practising professional.
- Example 2, on the other hand, takes place in a simulated situation which does not take into consideration all the complexities of a real patient in a real clinic. However, sometimes it is justifiable to assess under this condition because of the sheer logistical problems with a more authentic approach.

**What Kind of Learning is Promoted?**

- Practicum and clinical assessments encourage the development of practical hands-on skills.
- However, when the learning of declarative knowledge is separated from the learning of procedural knowledge, there is a danger of doing things ‘mindlessly.’ In such cases, the person functions like a technician rather than a professional. Thus, the use of demonstration with explanation should be encouraged whenever feasible.