

**OSCE (Objective Structured Clinical Examination):** Overview and Tips

OSCE is a type of examination that is often used in health sciences to test clinical skills against the standards of care. In OSCEs, rather than pure theoretical knowledge, clinical skills are also tested. Therefore, preparing for an OSCE is different than preparing for other exams. It is important to learn correct clinical methods and practice repeatedly until one perfects those methods.

An OSCE circuit comprises of short (5 -10 minutes) stations, in which each candidate is examined one-on-one basis with an examiner and a simulated patient (actor). The candidates rotate through the same standardized stations. At each station, a brief written statement introduces a clinical problem and directs the candidate to perform activities such as obtaining a focused history, conducting a focused physical examination, or assessing and addressing the patient's issues. Candidates might be requested to deduce data such as interpreting an electrocardiogram, identifying differential diagnosis, or suggesting an investigation or management plan for the patient.

- Check list for assessing candidates undertaking the OSCE include:
- Approach to the patient
  - Ability to take a focused history and perform a focused physical examination
  - Communication skills
  - Demonstration of ethical and professional behaviour
  - Completeness and orderliness in eliciting signs
  - Interpretations of signs and investigations in determining diagnosis and management
  - Appropriateness in management and further investigations.

Scenarios used in OSCE are related to key or common health issues and guidelines.

**Common Reasons for Failing OSCE**

- Perform potentially dangerous acts
- Provide misinformation
- Lack of skills and inadequate knowledge
- Careless attitude
- Unable to focus on patient's problem and address his/her complaints
- Poor communication

<http://en.wikiversity.org/wiki/category:OSCE>

Communication Skills Program at Dalhousie University

The website provides valuable information on communication skills including the Calgary-Cambridge Guide, presentations on breaking news or urgent communicators and dealing with irate patients, communication pocket cards, and many other resources.

<http://csp.medicine.dal.ca/teach.php>

Learners TV

A website that provides thousands of videos and lectures on physical examinations and other helpful materials.

<http://www.learnerstv.com/medical.php>

**OSCE Tips**

- Form study groups to practice for the OSCEs
- Ask colleagues for honest feedback (Constructive criticism).
- Practice with a timer.
- Practice describing the physical exam
- Practice scripts for difficult consultations
- Stay with tasks
- Treat simulated patients as real patients
- Do not make assumptions
- Do not be judgmental
- Use the patient's words and language
- Ask questions about activities rather than lifestyles
- Normalize the problem for the patient
- Address privacy and confidentiality proactively when appropriate
- Maintain a positive personal manner
- Knock before you enter the room
- Introduce yourself by name and address the patient as Mr., Mrs. Or Ms. as indicated in the information sheet.
- Maintain comfortable eye contact.
- Focus attention on the patient.
- Convey a sense of concern
- Be respectful of the patient

**Online Resources**

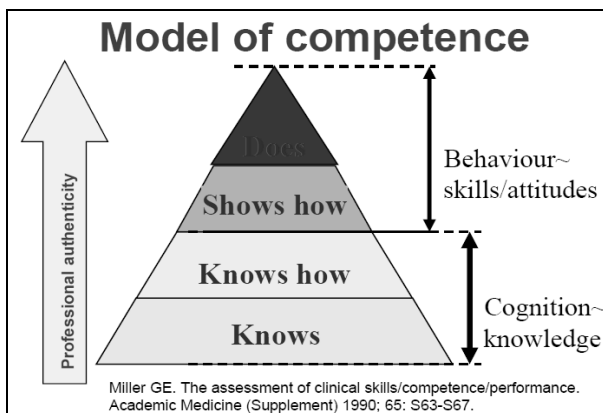
Medical Council of Canada  
Sample of cases, checklists, orientations and other information for the MCCQE II  
<http://mcc.ca/en/exams/qe2/reference.shtml>

OSCE Skills Website

OSCE Skills Website provides aid for a wealth of different OSCE skills from performing an abdominal exam to using a speculum. The website provides both pictures and descriptions of the various clinical skills.  
[www.osceskills.com](http://www.osceskills.com)

OSCE—Wikiversity

Provides a list of common OSCE stations and an approach plan for each one.



Most universities including Dalhousie have clinical skill labs where students have the opportunity to practice. It is often very helpful to practice in small groups with colleagues. Many OSCE textbooks (Refer to Suggested Books Fact Sheet [http://www.isisns.ca/documents/IMG\\_BP\\_Books-Feb2010.pdf](http://www.isisns.ca/documents/IMG_BP_Books-Feb2010.pdf)) have sample OSCE stations and mark sheets.