What Is Observational Assessment?

Observational assessment seeks to measure observable behaviors in the workplace or learning environment, with the objective of providing specific feedback to the subject of observation. The NBME uses both MSF instruments as well as instruments designed for a single point-in-time observation to meet the needs of clients.

A Redesign of the Assessment of Professional Behaviors Program

Originally conceptualized to address professionalism, the Assessment of Professional Behaviors (APB) program employed multisource feedback (MSF) to obtain information about a range of professional behaviors manifested in the learning and work settings that were deemed important in the formation of future physicians. Experience with the APB program highlighted both opportunities and challenges associated with using MSF to assess professionalism. The National Board of Medical Examiners® (NBME®) remains committed to assessing professionalism and related competencies in the workplace. Developmental efforts of the NBME are being broadened to include other observational assessment methods within a competencies framework to better align with residency programs’ and medical schools’ educational demands. Therefore, the current APB program will not be offered beginning July 2013.

Please remain subscribed to the Observational Assessment Newsletter to stay apprised of our ongoing work.

Pediatrics Milestones Assessment Pilot

The Pediatrics Milestones Assessment Pilot was conceived due to the mutual interest for quality assessment by the NBME and the Association of Pediatric Program Directors (APPD). In anticipation of the Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education’s new accreditation standards, the objectives of the collaboration were to:

1. Evaluate the reactions of pediatric faculty, residents, and pediatrics-bound students to a subset of the Pediatrics Milestones based on participation in assessment, feedback conversations, and surveys;
2. Test the feasibility of assessing pediatrics milestones using MSF and structured clinical observations (SCOs);
3. Investigate optimal solutions for transferring data from pilot sites to a central repository and returning reports for feedback sessions.

A total of 18 pediatric residency programs participated in the pilot. Six programs were identified by the APPD to participate in the pilot run by the NBME, and an additional 12 participated in the same pilot run by APPD Longitudinal Educational Assessment Research Network.

Preparation for the pilot involved numerous meetings for item development, which included pediatrics milestone authors, representatives from each site (residents, faculty, and program director), and NBME staff. The project team collaborated on item wording, form development, technology platforms and orientation and training materials.

The pilot launched in June of 2012. Each site was invited to evaluate one to two sub-interns (4th year medical students) and one to two interns (1st year residents) during each monthly rotation, over a period of six to nine months. Each subject was assessed using SCO forms, an MSF form and a milestones classification form (MCF). SCO forms were designed for observation of a learner taking a patient history and presenting on rounds. Sites were encouraged to complete as many SCO forms as possible. Multisource feedback was sought by faculty members, nurses and chief residents that the learner interacted with over the month rotation. Ratings on the SCO and MSF forms informed the completion of the MCF at the end of the rotation.

Ongoing research is focused on obtaining a better understanding of the feasibility of implementing these types of assessments on a larger scale. While learners valued the additional feedback provided by this process, future efforts will be geared toward increasing the validity and reliability of the feedback, and where possible reducing administrative burden. In addition, other types of assessment will be developed as needed to support the inferences that pediatric program directors need to make about their learners.