

Direct Observation of Practical Professional Skills (DOPPS)

A formative assessment tool



The Royal Australasian
College of Physicians

Purpose and overview

A Direct Observation of Practical Professional Skills encounter aims to guide trainee learning and achievement of competency in professional skills such as communication, leadership, management and teamwork. The trainee performs a practical professional activity in the workplace and is observed by an experienced and knowledgeable assessor who reviews the trainee's performance against a structured checklist. The assessor provides feedback to the trainee, which allows the trainee, the assessor and the trainee's supervisor to collaboratively identify learning needs and plan future learning opportunities.

By observing the practical professional skill, broken into components, in a structured manner, feedback can be focused on the various composite parts of the skill. Feedback on each component of the trainee's performance can be of greater value to the trainee than feedback on their overall performance, as areas for improvement and focus for future learning are more easily identified and the importance of considering the practical professional skill as comprised of a number of crucial components is emphasised.

What practical professional skills will the trainee be assessed on?

There are a number of possible situations that would be suitable for the Direct Observation of Practical Professional Skills. Some examples include: chairing a meeting; running a community forum or representing a work program at a public/community/stakeholder forum; media interview (real or mock); site visit/inspection/audit; running a journal club meeting; teaching. This list is not exhaustive and a number of other situations may be suitable.

The assessor does not need to be a Fellow of the Australasian Faculty of Public Health Medicine, but must have extensive experience in the situation and be approved by the trainee's supervisor. The supervisor can also be the assessor.

How is the trainee assessed?

While observing the trainee performing the chosen practical professional skill, the assessor uses the Direct Observation of Practical Professional Skills Rating Form to rate the trainee across up to six assessment domains, including:

- organisation and preparation
- introduction – clarification of purpose
- facilitation and communication
- management of the business of the encounter
- conclusion
- post-meeting follow up

For each of the domains observed, assessors rate the trainee on a nine-point scale according to what they would expect of a trainee in that particular year of training. Assessors mark 'not observed' for any domains not observed during that particular Direct Observation of Practical Professional Skills encounter. Domain ratings are a guide to rating the overall performance, but there is no specific formula connecting ratings in each domain with the overall performance.

How is feedback provided?

Following completion of the practical professional skill, the assessor provides feedback to the trainee on observed strengths, any areas which require improvement and the trainee's overall competence in the practical professional skill. Assessors should provide constructive feedback and identify areas for development, even if these are few.

The trainee is then given the opportunity to comment on the assessor's feedback, and together the trainee and assessor develop an action plan for future skill development. This action plan should be reviewed by the trainee's supervisor – if different to the assessor – shortly after development and again during the next trainee-supervisor meeting to assess the trainee's progress against the action plan.

What other information is available about the Direct Observation of Practical Professional Skills?

- **Assessment Guides** for a number of practical professional skills have been developed by the Australasian Faculty of Public Health Medicine and are intended to be used in conjunction with the Direct Observation of Practical Professional Skills Rating Form. Within each Assessment Guide, observable behaviours are listed for each domain of assessment on the Direct Observation of Practical Professional Skills Rating Form. These behaviours are considered to be markers of satisfactory performance of the procedure. Rather than a set of definitive criteria, the behaviours should be used as a guide to help assessors discriminate between ratings.
- **The Direct Observation of Practical Professional Skills Workflow** details the process of the assessment, including the roles and responsibilities of the trainee, assessor and supervisor.