Programs of assessment

Competency-based education is now widely accepted as international best practice for post-graduate medical education. To assess trainees, supervisors are required to make decisions about each trainee's competence across a range of pre-determined competencies. Supervisors require a large amount of information to support these important decisions about competence, and this is where a program of assessment is required.

A program of assessment is the planned and deliberate use of assessments rather than an arbitrary selection of tools and content for assessment. It is planned so that a whole overall picture of the trainee's competence can be formed. Whilst single assessments provide only a snap shot of the trainee's competence in a particular situation and point in time, repeat observations and assessments in varying contexts by multiple supervisors help the supervisor to form an overall view of the trainee's competence[3].

Planning a program of assessment includes selection of a variety of assessment methods that sample as many situations as possible. Assessments should ideally provide feedback on a variety of aspects of practice, such as medical knowledge, communication, and quality and safety. Assessments should also be undertaken across a range of contexts and include different methods such direct observations, case discussions, written reflections. By collecting assessment information across the breadth of practice, a complete view of the trainee's performance can be formed.

As well as providing evidence for high-stakes decisions about competence, programs of assessment are designed to maximise learning throughout the training program. Supervisors will combine information that they gained from assessments and, together with the trainee, will use this to plan learning activities and learning goals. Information gained through assessments can be used to continuously measure progression towards the end goals of the learning program. This follows the concept of assessment *for* learning, as compared to assessment *of* learning[4].