LEADING ARTICLE

Extended Functional Practical Exam (EFPE) in Health Professions Education: Suez Canal University Experience

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Introduction:

Since its establishment as a pioneering Medical Education Department in Egypt and the Eastern Mediterranean/North African/Arab Region, The Medical Education Department in the Faculty of Medicine, Suez Canal University had taken the initiative to become accountable and actively participate in updating and innovating the educational strategies and assessment tools in Health Professions Education in this region [1].

In Egypt and in the Arab Region, Health Professions Education (HPE) had been practiced for decades without formal training of Faculty in education sciences. Faculty members are the corner stone of the educational process.² Health Professions Education Institutions are totally dependent on its own Faculty members to handle and solve its pertinent educational problems.

What problem was addressed?

In HPE in Egypt, we have the habit of holding practical exams in our post-graduate studies as part of Master and Doctorate degrees in

the form of a practical task with a very short notice prior to the date of presenting the task in front of the exam committee. In most of cases, if not all, this practical task does not constitute a specific function that could be of benefit to the work place, whether this work place is an academic or clinical department or of benefit to the whole institution. On the other hand, many unachieved practical tasks, and so many pertinent problems in education are always looking for staff volunteers, but in most of cases found none.

What was tried?

A pilot practical exam that is functional, which means it performs a specific needed function within the institution where the examinee is working, has been designed for a PhD Medical Education student with abundant time before the exam (in our pilot it was 6 months prior to the exam). It was meant to extend the duration up to 6 months to give an enough time to the examinee to plan, conduct, and assess the immediate impact of performing the task that should fulfill a certain educational need or solve an educational problem. In our pilot, the task was: Designing a students' portfolio system in undergraduate study of a medical school to fulfill an accreditation requirement. The exam has been designed in the form of 3 phases; the first is to ask the candidate to plan the task, in writing, after receiving a written task with all the specifics and durations. The plan is to be submitted in two weeks duration from receiving the task. In one week the examinee receives a verbal and numerical feed-back which is recorded as part of the overall evaluation of the practical exam. The examinee starts immediately to refine her/his plan according to the review comments of the examination committee. The candidate starts then to implement her/his plan with full documentation of every step and this takes three months duration. An immediate impact is assessed by all stake holders including students, peer faculty, administration, and community in case it is involved. The impact assessment starts after two months from finishing the implementation phase. A collective score is given to the candidate by adding the score of each evaluated phase.

What lessons were learned?

We used the practical exam as a platform to provide dual benefits for both the post-graduate examinee and the work place in health professions education. The examinee is benefited by performing more solid practical tasks and learns additional skills.

"Assessment can reinforce the efficacy of teaching and learning. It also encourages the understanding of teaching as a formative process that evolves over time with feedback and input from students".³

As for the work place, this would help solve un-attempted educational problems that look for serious problem solvers and un-achieved educational goals or needs that no one is willing to achieve. A number of competencies are acquired through subjecting the candidate to this newly proposed model of practical exams. Managerial competencies like planning and execution of a whole educational project including information management and change management could be among those competencies. Being a problem solver by learning how to identify an educational problem and find the proper solutions for it is definitely another competence to be learnt.

References:

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