

CORRESPONDENCE

Open Access

Response to: viva la VOSCE?

Lucinda Zahrah Motie*  and Shahil Kaini



Abstract

Boyle et al. discuss the development and implementation of a Virtual Objective Structured Clinical Examination due to the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown precluding face-to-face Objective Structured Clinical Examinations, something we too as clinical medical students studying at University College London have experienced. We commend Boyle et al. for promptly creating and delivering this assessment. However, we believe this style of assessment has the potential to exacerbate the ethnic and social inequalities that currently exist within medical education. Going forward, it is imperative that the home environment is considered in an attempt to level the playing field.

Dear Editor,

We read with great interest the article by Boyle et al. [1] regarding the development and implementation of a Virtual Objective Structured Clinical Examination (VOSCE) during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown. As clinical medical students studying at University College London (UCL), our summative Objective Structured Clinical Examinations (OSCE) was precluded due to the pandemic and so it was thought-provoking to read how the novel VOSCE successfully allowed the assessment of clinical performance.

We commend Boyle et al. [1] for their prompt ability to create and deliver a VOSCE. Although the main focus of the article was on delivery and logistical planning of this novel model, we believe there needs to be a greater discussion around how this style of assessment has the potential to exacerbate the ethnic and social inequalities that exist within medical education [2]. The environment in which a student takes part in virtual assessments can provide many challenges. There is a need for private, quiet space with adequate broadband. However, for a subset of students this may prove difficult. These individuals may include those from a background of a low socioeconomic status (SES), for whom housing characteristics are associated with SES [3].

Furthermore, some students may have additional responsibilities at home, such as being a carer or parent. International students may also struggle when living in a different time zone. Within literature, social differences have already been demonstrated to adversely impact medical student performance [2]. Going forward, it is imperative to consider the home environment of medical students when implementing virtual examinations in an attempt to level the playing field.

We understand that this format of examination was a temporary measure put in place due to the COVID-19 pandemic. If this style of assessment was to be utilised again, medical schools would have longer than Boyle et al. [1] to plan a VOSCE and so greater efforts could be made to minimise disparities. For example, at UCL, medical students who would have been disadvantaged by their home environment during the virtual single best answer summative were provided with an official space on campus. This was both quiet with reliable internet and adhered to social distancing requirements. Minority ethnic groups are already more likely to underperform and fail medical school examinations [4]. Following the COVID-19 pandemic, it is vital that any changes to the medical school curriculum do not further widen the attainment gap and disproportionately impact the socially disadvantaged.

* Correspondence: lucinda.motie.14@ucl.ac.uk
University College London (UCL), Gower St, London, UK



© The Author(s). 2021 **Open Access** This article is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License, which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons licence, and indicate if changes were made. The images or other third party material in this article are included in the article's Creative Commons licence, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the article's Creative Commons licence and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder. To view a copy of this licence, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>. The Creative Commons Public Domain Dedication waiver (<http://creativecommons.org/publicdomain/zero/1.0/>) applies to the data made available in this article, unless otherwise stated in a credit line to the data.

Abbreviations

VOSCE: Virtual Objective Structured Clinical Examination; OSCE: Objective Structured Clinical Examinations; SES: Socioeconomic status

Acknowledgments

Not applicable.

Authors' contributions

All authors (LZM, SK) have contributed equally to the development of this letter. All authors have read and approved the final manuscript.

Funding

The authors declare no funding for the research.

Availability of data and materials

Not applicable.

Declarations**Ethics approval and consent to participate**

No ethics approval was required.

Consent for publication

Not applicable.

Competing interests

The authors declare they have no competing interests.

Received: 18 January 2021 Accepted: 8 September 2021

Published online: 11 October 2021

References

1. Boyle JG, Colquhoun I, Noonan Z, McDowall S, Walters MR, Leach JP. Viva la VOSCE? *BMC Med Educ.* 2020;20(1):514. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12909-020-02444-3>.
2. Lionis C. Ethnic and social disparities in medical education. *Med Educ.* 2015; 49(1):19–20. <https://doi.org/10.1111/medu.12609>.
3. Juhn YJ, Beebe TJ, Finnie DM, Sloan J, Wheeler PH, Yawn B, et al. Development and initial testing of a new socioeconomic status measure based on housing data. *J Urban Health.* 2011;88(5):933–44. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11524-011-9572-7>.
4. Woolf K, McManus IC, Potts HW, Dacre J. The mediators of minority ethnic underperformance in final medical school examinations. *Br J Educ Psychol.* 2013;83(1):135–59. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.2044-8279.2011.02060.x>.

Publisher's Note

Springer Nature remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.

Ready to submit your research? Choose BMC and benefit from:

- fast, convenient online submission
- thorough peer review by experienced researchers in your field
- rapid publication on acceptance
- support for research data, including large and complex data types
- gold Open Access which fosters wider collaboration and increased citations
- maximum visibility for your research: over 100M website views per year

At BMC, research is always in progress.

Learn more biomedcentral.com/submissions

