

Letters to the Editor

Medical students viva: random versus structured format.

Sir,

Viva is an essential part of assessment of medical students.^{1,4} However, the viva system is often blamed for its subjectivity. While interviewing a group of students, it was brought to the attention of our faculty how students feel regarding the viva. The majority of them aired complaints regarding the unfairness of the viva. The most frequent concern was regarding the topics covered in the viva. They feel that subjects are not evenly covered and thus there is a bias in the viva system. As academicians and faculty members, we always try to remain unbiased in the evaluation process. To eliminate this chance and to comply with student complaint, there arises a need for a structured viva format rather than random viva question format. The main aim of any viva system is to test mental agility and knowledge of the student. For fair assessment, the topics have to be selected carefully from the curriculum with the aim of not duplicating the areas that are covered in another examination format (long cases, short cases, multiple choice questions). Areas covered (Topic selection): 1. Curriculum based: (lectures, tutorials, seminars) Anemia, heart failure, dehydration, seizure, asthma, sickle cell disease etc. 2. System-wise; (Table 1) Common problems from the respective system: Respiratory (asthma), cardiovascular (heart failure), neurology (seizure), metabolic (diabetes), hematology (anemia, sickle cell disease). Two styles are to be followed: 1. Case-based: A case is given and diagnosis and management is asked. This type will evaluate the student of his or her diagnostic capabilities as well as his decision taking ability. It's a 2-stage evaluation style. Wrong diagnosis means wrong management. For example: A 3 day old male infant is brought to

the emergency department with a history of fever and vomiting for one day with irritability. The questions to follow are: What is the differential diagnosis? How will you approach such a patient? Investigations? Management? 2. Problem-based. A problem is presented followed by management questions. For example: Hyponatremia, hypoglycemia, diabetic ketoacidosis, dehydration. Advantage of the structured format: Two-way feedback is possible by following the structured viva format (Table 1): 1. Student can be updated on their weakness. They should be told about the areas where they need more attention and further study. 2. Teachers will know the areas where more stress should be given. The weaknesses of the students in certain areas or topics justifies the need for more lectures or tutorials on that topic. In conclusion, for an objective assessment of medical students, a structured approach should be adopted for viva evaluation.

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References

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Table 1 - System-wise approach to viva.

Student	CNS Seizure Meningitis	Respiratory Asthma Epiglottitis	GIT Gastroenteritis Dehydration	CVS Rh. fever Heart Failure	Hematology Anemia Sickle cell	Miscellaneous Vaccination Breast feeding	Total marks Grade
312000	Poor	Poor	Poor	Fair	Fair	Fair	D to E
322000	Fair	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good	B to C
332000	Poor	Fair	Good	Fair	Fair	Fair	C to D
342000	Fair	Good	Good	Poor	Good	Good	B to C
<p>Quick raw conclusions (could be used for feedback): Student 312000 needs a re-sit examination Student 322000 is overall good but has to work on the CNS Student 332000 is borderline pass Student 342000 is good but needs more attention in cardiology All students need more attention (lectures, tutorials, seminars) on CNS Topics Students are good at hematology GIT - Gastrointestinal system; CVS - Cardiovascular system; CNS - Central nervous system</p>							