

# Implementing competency-based assessment in the workplace: where theory meets practice

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## ABSTRACT

**Background:** Reassurance of medical competence and optimal patient care is ensured when trainees are evaluated and guided in authentic learning environments. Competency-based medical education (CBME) and assessment has been universally adopted to certify graduating physicians' readiness to practice. Although some competencies about knowledge or shared-decision making could be assessed through traditional methods, assessing other competencies is most reliable only when directly observing trainees in the workplace. A workplace-based assessment system that also includes evaluation of competencies could provide a more holistic idea about trainees' medical competence.

**Methods:** In a development pilot study, we investigated the implementation and users' acceptability of a competency-based way of assessment in the workplace. We developed a competency-based assessment system for the workplace based on the CanMEDS competency framework. The system comprised of two competency-based structured clinical observation instruments: one focusing on communication and interpersonal skills and another one focusing on procedural and practical skills. We implemented this system in the Flemish postgraduate General Practitioner's (GP) Training. Between March 2021 and June 2021, the study participants had to use the two instruments, and, afterwards to fill in a series of questionnaires, with closed and open-ended questions.

**Results:** The assessment system facilitated initiating workplace assessment and discussing negative feedback when needed. Users found the system relatively helpful for workplace evaluation. Additionally, visualization of competency-based growth was another advantage based on the users' responses. However, giving and receiving meaningful and on-the-spot feedback was hampered. Users claimed that the CanMEDS enabling competencies were not unquestionably observable and applicable at the clinical workplace.

**Conclusion:** A competency-based assessment system for workplace evaluation could be successfully implemented, with some considerations. Users' reactions showed that such a system could be useful, helpful, and time efficient. Careful preparation and construction of the assessment instruments was crucial. Special attention should be paid to the choice of an appropriate competency framework before implementation.

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