Challenges in implementing new assessment methods of students’ learning in the University of Medicine and Pharmacy of Tîrgu Mureș, Romania

Angela Borda

Department of Histology,
Vice Rector for International Relations and Quality Management
University of Medicine and Pharmacy of Tirgu Mures

prorector_int@umftgm.ro

Curriculum development is a priority of the strategic plan 2016-2020 of the University of Medicine and Pharmacy of Tîrgu Mureș (UMFTGM) with the main objective to align medical education to European standards. The curriculum reform process started three years ago and the most important steps were: 1. Establishment of a new administrative structure, responsible for the curriculum reform, coordinated by the Vice-rector for teaching affairs (CEIPSCU); 2. Involvement of international experts in Medical Education; 3. Training of local experts in Medical Education; and 4. Engagement of important political decisions, which were included in a new regulation and were approved by the Senate.

The assessment of students’ learning is an important part of this process and in my presentation I would like to highlight why and how UMFTGM implemented changes in the assessment of students’ learning. The main goals for these changes were to make the learning process continuous (introduction of formative examinations), to make a uniform assessment for all the students, regardless of the series or the language of study they attend (Romanian, Hungarian, English), to prepare better questions, peer reviewed by other members of the department and from outside the department, to make the marking method transparent, to avoid cheating.

A first measure involved the whole academic community: the introduction of multiple-choice questions (MCQ) testing which became mandatory for the theoretical examination in all subjects. It was a hard political decision and it did not bring peace in the academic community which became divided into two: for and against. The main invoked reasons were that: by MCQ teachers cannot test the medical thinking of the students or their ability to make connections, teachers no longer have the possibility to face the student, students cannot acquire a medical or scientific language, teachers do not know how to prepare suitable MCQ, and so on. One year later, a survey regarding the satisfaction of the students on assessment methods, which also included MCQ testing, was performed and the SWOT analysis showed very few strengths and a lot of weaknesses and threats.

The other measures were implemented only in pilot subjects and involved practical and theoretical examination as well. In non-clinical activities a prelab report became mandatory in order to be admitted to the practical activity. These practical activities are marked weekly, on a regular basis, to provide meaningful feedback to the students.
about their performance. In clinical departments as well, a continuous evaluation during the semester (case presentation or activities in the simulation center) is mandatory to be admitted to the final examination. The evaluation of all practical activities, in different percentages, is part of the final grade.

For theoretical evaluation, two TBL sessions per semester, as formative examination, were introduced. For summative examination, MCQ testing is standardized for all the students regardless of the series they attend. To improve the quality of the questions, a peer-review system by other members of the same department but also by members of other departments was implemented. In the same time, training for writing better MCQ was provided to all the teachers.

The CEIPSCU office is responsible for collecting the results from all the pilot subjects. A complex analysis is performed after each examination session. The results of this analysis, along with recommendations for improvement, are provided for each of these subjects.

Thus, examinations are used to provide guidance to the students on their performance, to give the faculty a feedback on how well the curriculum is functioning, but also to give feedback to the teachers about how quality assurance principles are respected by the examination system.

In conclusion, being aware that assessment shapes what students learn, we have to be certain that we are doing it right and using it well.