

## Capacity building of teachers to conduct fair online assessments

### INTRODUCTION

Online assessments in medical education have brought about a considerable transformation in how medical students are assessed.<sup>[1]</sup> Paper-based assessments had their share of merits, but they were tedious to conduct, lots of paper was used, the manual grading process made it a burden for the teachers, and it required lots of time investment to evaluate students' responses.<sup>[1,2]</sup> In contrast, online assessments benefit teachers, students, administrators and medical schools, and thus, a paradigm shift in online assessments has been reported worldwide.<sup>[1,2]</sup> Owing to the ability of online assessments to provide feedback to students in real-time, improvement in security measures, flexibility in the conduct, etc., these assessments are gradually becoming an indispensable aspect of medical education delivery.<sup>[1,2]</sup> However, the emergence of the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic has essentially provided online assessments the right boost and played a significant role in their expansion.<sup>[3]</sup>

### MEASURING THE TEACHER READINESS

As teachers will be the ones who will be working in the background in the planning, implementation and integration process of online assessments into the medical curriculum, we must ascertain their readiness regarding the same.<sup>[4]</sup> The best approach to get an in-depth understanding is through the conduct of a comprehensive needs assessment, which will provide insights to the administrators – which areas teachers are good at, where they need hand-holding and what infrastructure and technical support is required to empower them to discharge their roles as assessor effectively in the changing face of modern medical education.<sup>[2,3]</sup> The needs assessment will also uncover teachers' existing knowledge and skills in planning and conducting safe and transparent online assessments.<sup>[4,5]</sup> As online assessments, in the initial stages, are expected to supplement the conventional paper-based assessments, the need assessment can also target to identify the frequency with which these assessments need to be done and for what purpose (to measure how students are learning or to decide about pass or fail).<sup>[3,4,6]</sup>

### TRAINING OF TEACHERS

The teachers' competence levels will define the successful conduct of online assessments, and thus, capacity-building activities to empower them for their new role are required. This can be accomplished with the help of training programmes to empower teachers in designing, developing and conducting effective online assessments in medical education.<sup>[7]</sup> In other words, the teachers need to be exposed to different ways in which online assessments can be conducted and the settings in which each can be selected to make assessments focused.<sup>[7,8]</sup> Teachers can also be exposed to domain-specific online assessment tools, and based on the feasibility and institutional support, these can be implemented, starting initially with cognitive domain-based assessments. There is also a need to expose teachers to the unfair means that students might adopt and the modifications/strategies that teachers must adopt to conduct fair and transparent assessments.<sup>[9,10]</sup> Finally, similar to paper-based assessments, even online assessments should be planned in alignment with the learning objectives to ensure that students benefit and assessments serve their purpose.

### TRAINING PROGRAMME FOR TEACHERS

The training programme may differ from one institution to another depending on the needs assessment findings, the available infrastructure in the institute and the domain we are targeting in online assessments.<sup>[7]</sup> It is a must that trainers of teachers have at least 1–2 years of experience conducting online assessments. Regardless of the nature and duration of the training programme, the successful implementation of online assessments in medical college, the training must target members of the curriculum committee, heads of the departments and one to two faculty members from each department (who will act as a change agent in their departments to train other faculty members, in the presence of one member of Medical Education Unit) to begin with.

The outcome of the proposed training programme can be significantly improved by conducting it in a hands-on mode and employing several engaging teaching-learning methods during the training programmes. Further, pre-and post-tests to measure changes in knowledge and skills that can be attributed to training sessions need to be conducted. As budgeting is essential, the organisers must enlist various sub-headings (such as remuneration and travel cost of external experts, food arrangements and stationary)

under which expenditures can be incurred, and in addition, plan for the evaluation of the workshop to identify the strengths and the areas that need to be improved in future workshops. The refresher training is required and supports individual departments as and when they plan to conduct online assessments.<sup>[7]</sup>

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, online assessments have been linked with multiple benefits to stakeholders. However, its successful planning and conduct depend on capacity-building training programmes to augment teachers' competence levels and empowerment.

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There are no conflicts of interest.

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