Desire and reality--teaching and assessing communicative competencies in undergraduate medical education in German-speaking Europe--a survey.

Increasingly, communicative competencies are becoming a permanent feature of training and assessment in German-speaking medical schools (n=43; Germany, Austria, Switzerland - "D-A-CH"). In support of further curricular development of communicative competencies, the survey by the "Communicative and Social Competencies" (KusK) committee of the German Society for Medical Education (GMA) systematically appraises the scope of and form in which teaching and assessment take place. The iterative online questionnaire, developed in cooperation with KusK, comprises 70 questions regarding instruction (n=14), assessment (n=48), local conditions (n=5), with three fields for further remarks. Per location, two to three individuals who were familiar with the respective institute's curriculum were invited to take part in the survey. Thirty-nine medical schools (40 degree programmes) took part in the survey. Communicative competencies are taught in all of the programmes. Ten degree programmes have a longitudinal curriculum for communicative competencies; 25 programmes offer this in part. Sixteen
of the 40 programmes use the Basler Consensus Statement for orientation. In over 80% of the degree programmes, communicative competencies are taught in the second and third year of studies. Almost all of the programmes work with simulated patients (n=38) and feedback (n=37). Exams are exclusively summative (n=11), exclusively formative (n=3), or both summative and formative (n=16) and usually take place in the fifth or sixth year of studies (n=22 and n=20). Apart from written examinations (n=15) and presentations (n=9), practical examinations are primarily administered (OSCE, n=31); WPA (n=8), usually with self-developed scales (OSCE, n=19). With regards to the examiners' training and the manner of results-reporting to the students, there is a high variance. Instruction in communicative competencies has been implemented at all 39 of the participating medical schools. For the most part, communicative competencies instruction in the D-A-C-H region takes place in small groups and is tested using the OSCE. The challenges for further curricular development lie in the expansion of feedback, the critical evaluation of appropriate assessment strategies, and in the quality assurance of exams.

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