

Assessment for Learning in Medical Education

On-screen: [Anastasiya Lipnevich, PHD. Visiting Scholar, NBME.]

I joined NBME in June of 2024, and I've been working on a number of really meaningful and exciting projects, and I've been enjoying every moment of it.

On-screen: [What is assessment for learning?]

In general, Assessment for Learning teaches learners how to be effective master adaptive learners, how to be lifelong learners, how to never stop and constantly engage in this meaningful self-reflection that increases their competencies beyond where they currently are.

On-screen: [Breaking down assessment.]

In medical education assessment at its core involves systematic gathering of information to form a comprehensive judgment about learners' knowledge, abilities, competencies, and form this judgment about their readiness for medical practice. An assessment comes in two different forms: summative assessment and formative assessment.

So summative assessment usually happens at the end of the course, at the end of a unit, at the end of the program, and it provides information to the learner and to various stakeholders about what a student has learned.

Formative assessment has a different function, so formative assessment is all about learning. The purpose of formative assessment, which is also known as Assessment for Learning, is to help students learn. And there are multiple components to formative assessment, and they include formulating learning objectives, gathering assessment information, and providing feedback. Formative assessment also provides information to the instructors on how to pivot the instruction, how to adjust their pedagogical approaches so that they can help all learners individually and in general to achieve their desired goals.

If you think about medical education, we don't usually treat patients without diagnosing them. So the same goes for formative assessment. We need to assess where a student stands on a variety of meaningful competencies, knowledge, skills, and abilities in order to provide individualized instruction so that they can improve further.

On-screen: [Why is assessment for learning important?]

In simulations, for example, or in training, we can give them more space, right? So they can make mistakes, they can fail and they can try again. And that's the essence of Assessment for Learning. It creates that safe space for the learners to, again, make mistakes and practice their skill in safe environments.

Learning objectives are also important for both instructors and learners. We need to formulate really clear learning objectives so that learners understand what skills we are developing.

And for the instructors, if learning objectives are clearly formulated, then that they can provide the best quality feedback to the students to tell them, okay, so you are really hitting the benchmark that we have for you, or, no, you're not quite there, and here is what you need to do in order to get there.

In medical education, mastering this vast array of knowledge, skills, and abilities is just part of the journey. Even more important is this ability to self-improve and self-improvement requires high quality self-reflection.

On-screen: [Self-reflection.]

We need to have a structure for self-reflection, and this is where Assessment for Learning comes in. Because Assessment for Learning includes this learning objectives and assessment, constant assessment, constant gathering of information of where you're standing right now, plus feedback. When they leave medical education, when they are in the field and working with patients, they'll be able to continuously self-assess, to have a clear goal in mind. What is it that I'm trying to do here? And also seek feedback or generate effective self-feedback.

There is constantly new technologies, new approaches for treatments, diagnosis, and so on coming along. So it's not your standard, you know, you passed, you failed. We are providing tailored resources to students who may need a little bit more help than their counterparts, than their peers.

I'm having a very enjoyable time at NBME. I have, I have no plans of stopping working with this wonderful organization because I'm really excited about its commitment to formative assessment, which in my opinion is the future and the present of education in general.

On-screen: [NBME Copyright © 2025 NBME. All Rights Reserved.]