



Research

An objective structured teaching exercise (OSTE) for preceptor development

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Abstract

Purpose: To pilot test an objective structured teaching exercise (OSTE) to determine its feasibility and acceptability as a preceptor development method.

Methods: Phase I: A comprehensive training needs analysis was conducted. Data from a survey of pharmacy practice preceptors as well as students' evaluations of preceptors were analyzed using qualitative and descriptive methods. Preceptor training needs amenable to the OSTE format were identified. Phase II: Three OSTE cases were developed. A pre/post-OSTE survey measured preceptor reaction to the method and preceptor performance on each OSTE case was observed. Welch's *t*-test was used to assess the differences between mean responses of preceptors on the pre/post-OSTE survey.

Results: Phase I: Needs analysis suggested that preceptors needed more training when communicating feedback to learners in three situations: (1) a poor or failing evaluation, (2) an observed patient encounter involving an over-the-counter recommendation, and (3) an observed patient counseling session regarding metered-dose inhaler use. In all, 15 preceptors participated in the OSTE. Preceptor confidence in performing the skills practiced during the OSTE significantly improved. Preceptors reported that OSTE is an effective method to enhance feedback skills.

Conclusion: OSTE is an effective and well-received method for training pharmacy preceptors.

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Abbreviations: OSTE, objective structured teaching exercise; PharmD, Doctor of Pharmacy; ACPE, Accreditation Council for Pharmacy Education; ASHP, American Society of Health-System Pharmacists; AACP, American Association of Colleges of Pharmacy; OSCEs, objective structured clinical examinations; APPE, Advanced Pharmacy Practice Experience; MLS, METI Learning Space®; OTC, over-the-counter; SD, significant deficiency

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Background

Hands-on pharmacy practice experiences are a requirement for all PharmD and residency training programs. However, the quality of these experiences is contingent upon the knowledge, skills, and abilities of the preceptor.^{1,2} Although the ACPE Doctor of Pharmacy Program and the ASHP pharmacy residency accreditation standards both require ongoing training and development of preceptors, there is a paucity of data regarding outcomes measures of preceptor development programs.^{3–6}

The AACP conducted a survey during 2009–2011, querying pharmacy preceptors about the effectiveness of preceptor development programs. Over 75% of respondents either strongly agreed or agreed that such training was available, but improvement was needed.⁷ Another study found that preceptors overestimated their performance regarding teaching behaviors, such as providing opportunity for students to ask and exchange opinions and being available when students needed help, when compared with student evaluations.⁸ These findings suggest that there continues to be a need to enhance teaching skills among pharmacy preceptors.

The art of providing constructive feedback is an essential skill during a learning experience. Yet, Wilkinson et al.⁹ reported that preceptors often lack formal training in this area. Preceptor development programs should provide pharmacy preceptors not only with new knowledge but also with the opportunity to acquire new skills and habits related to both their patient care and teaching responsibilities.¹⁰ While various traditional methods have been utilized for preceptor development over the years, such as lectures and case discussions, these methods often lack opportunity for the adult learner to apply knowledge in real-world situations. Consequently, these methods of training result in less than optimal learning and little behavior change.¹¹

The AACP Council of Faculties Faculty Affairs Committee recommended that preceptor development programs would be improved by identifying training needs and assessing program effectiveness through standardized methods of evaluation using reliable and valid tools. Additionally, recommendations were made to base these assessments on the principles articulated in Kirkpatrick's four levels of evaluation for training programs.³

A potential model for providing more effective preceptor development is an OSTE. Similar to OSCEs, this method attempts to create realistic, high-fidelity preceptor–student encounters in a standardized manner.¹² The OSTE technique provides preceptors with an opportunity to practice teaching skills, engage in self-assessment, and observe their own performance while receiving feedback in a low-threat environment.

Previous studies have explored the use of OSTEs to develop medical school preceptors who supervise medical students and residents during required ambulatory care experiences.^{13–16} Participants in an OSTE workshop agreed

that peer observation allowed them to learn from other preceptors and the “actor” accurately portrayed the student role.¹³ Participants in another OSTE workshop indicated that they felt challenged and that the OSTE method stimulated their learning.¹⁴ Furthermore, OSTE sessions made preceptors more aware of their teaching behaviors, and they were inclined to change their behavior based on the feedback provided from students.¹⁵

An OSTE at the University of California, Irvine, College of Medicine focused on assessing preceptors' teaching performance.¹⁶ After participating in the OSTE experience, participants reported being neutral about whether or not OSTE would alter their teaching practices. Moreover, the respondents felt that the OSTE activity was time-consuming. However, they did strongly agree that this method of training would result in increased interest in future faculty development activities. In contrast, the OSTE workshop facilitators felt that the technique was highly useful and provided valuable insight into practice-related teaching expectations.

A study has evaluated the feasibility of OSTE for pharmacy faculty development.⁸ While some participants did not respond empathetically, follow up, or guide students to present the information in an orderly manner, they all agreed that OSTE is an effective approach, that the cases were realistic, and that it was a method that could be used with residents and preceptors to enhance their capacity to be better preceptors.

Based on these studies' results, OSTE appears to be an effective method for developing preceptors' overall skills and evaluating their performance while addressing the weaknesses of more traditional approaches. The objective of this study was to identify preceptor development needs amenable to the OSTE format by conducting a comprehensive training needs analysis and to pilot test an OSTE program for community pharmacy preceptors at the University of Maryland School of Pharmacy. The University of Maryland Institutional Review Board reviewed and approved the project proposal and the survey instruments.

Methods

Training needs analysis

A 49-item comprehensive training needs analysis survey was developed by study investigators. The goal of this survey was to identify preceptor development needs amenable to the OSTE format. The survey was piloted to all full-time pharmacy practice faculty members at University of Maryland School of Pharmacy. The draft survey was sent via e-mail to collect their feedback regarding the completeness and clarity of the survey, including the introduction, instructions, rating scale, and individual items. Pilot testers ($n = 9$; 26% response rate) provided several suggestions for improvement of the draft survey. A revised survey instrument was sent to all APPE community pharmacy preceptors

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