

# Can We Get Faculty Interviewers on the Same Page? An Examination of a Structured Interview Course for Surgeons

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**INTRODUCTION:** Guidance on how to train faculty to conduct structured interviews and implement them into current screening processes is lacking. The goal of this study is to describe a structured interview training program designed specifically for surgeons and examine its effectiveness.

**METHODS:** Faculty involved in advanced surgical fellowship interviews completed a 20-item knowledge assessment and video-based applicant interview ratings before taking a half-day course on conducting structured interviews. The course consisted of evidence-based strategies and methods for conducting structured interviews, asking questions, and rating applicants in a highly interactive format. After the course, faculty again completed the knowledge assessment and provided ratings for 3 video-based applicant interviews.

**RESULTS:** All faculty members ( $N = 5$ ) responsible for selecting fellows in minimally invasive and bariatric surgery completed the training. Faculty had an average of  $15.8 \pm 9.12$  years in practice. Average performance on the precourse knowledge assessment was  $35\% \pm 6.12\%$  and the group was unable to achieve acceptable agreement for applicant interview scores for any of the competencies assessed. After the course, faculty demonstrated significant improvements ( $p < 0.01$ ) on the knowledge assessment, more than doubling their scores on the pretest with average scores of  $80\% \pm 9.35\%$ . Faculty also improved their interrater agreement of applicant competency, with 80% of the applicant interview ratings within 2 points of each other.

**CONCLUSIONS:** Implementation of a half-day course designed to teach principles and skills around structured interviewing and assessment demonstrated significant improvements in both interviewing knowledge and interrater agreement. These findings support the time and resources required to develop and implement a structured interview training program for surgeons for the postgraduate admissions process. (J Surg Ed ■■■■-■■■. ©2017 Association of Program Directors in Surgery. Published by Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.)

**KEY WORDS:** interview, selection, residency

**COMPETENCIES:** Systems-Based Practice

## INTRODUCTION

Program directors have seen a steady increase in the applicant pool for general surgery residency positions over the past 5 years,<sup>1</sup> creating a significant burden on programs and administrators to identify applicants that best fit into their training environment.<sup>2</sup> The screening process for filling residency positions typically involves review of an applicant's United States Medical Licensing Examination step 1 scores, grades in third year of medical school, and letters of recommendation. Those who pass a predefined threshold are invited for an on-site interview.<sup>3</sup> This last hurdle, the interview, has been identified as the most important factor in determining final selections.<sup>4-6</sup>

Despite the substantial weight given to the interview in residency selection,<sup>4-7</sup> studies have documented the subjectivity of these interviews by noting extreme amounts of variability in duration, structure, and methods used both within and between programs.<sup>3</sup> Not only does this lack of structure result in low interrater reliability<sup>8</sup> and inability to

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**TABLE 1.** Course Components and Delivery Methods

Course Topic	Delivery Method				
	Didactics	Video or Audio-Based Case Review	Small Group Discussion	Role Play	Other Active Learning Strategies
Part I: Background					
Structured interview basics	x		x		
Question development	x		x		
Biases in interviews		x	x		
Part II: Asking Questions					
Getting complete responses		x	x		
Types of interviewing questions	x		x		
Unacceptable and illegal questions		x	x	x	x
Taking notes		x			x
Part III: Assessment					
Assigning ratings		x	x	x	x
Motivational fit		x	x		
Integrating data	x		x		
Part IV: Putting It All Together					
Interview day basics	x				
Review		x	x		

predict future performance,<sup>2</sup> but it also contributes to a high incidence of potentially illegal questions asked during surgery residency interviews.<sup>8</sup> For these reasons, educators have criticized the traditional resident selection interview for having “dubious value.”<sup>2</sup>

Structured interviews, in contrast, rely on more objective evaluation methods, such as consistently asking only questions related to position requirements, providing training on interviewing skills, and rating interviewees using established scoring formats.<sup>9</sup> Numerous meta-analyses have shown the ability of structured interviews to predict performance across a wide array of settings, at a rate twice as high as unstructured interviews.<sup>10-12</sup> Further comparison of these techniques has revealed that it requires a minimum of 4 unstructured interviews to achieve the levels of reliability and predictive validity that one interviewer using structured interview techniques would attain.<sup>13</sup> For these reasons, incorporation of structured interviews has been considered as a best practice among medical educators.<sup>2,14</sup>

Unfortunately, guidance on how to train faculty to conduct these interviews and implement into current screening processes is lacking. The goal of this study is to describe a structured interview training program designed specifically for surgeons and examine its effectiveness.

## METHODS

### Pretraining Assessment

Before beginning the course, participants completed 2 forms of pretraining assessments. The first consisted of a 20-item knowledge assessment, which examined participant’s

baseline knowledge regarding characteristics of structured interviews, biases in interviewing, unacceptable questions, question formats, note taking, and rating techniques. Participants then reviewed a video depicting an interview between an applicant (Nico) and faculty surgeon, and rated the applicant’s interpersonal skills, communication, and adaptability according to a behavioral anchor rating scale specific to the respective competencies (1 = much less than acceptable; 5 = acceptable; 10 = much more than acceptable). Participants were asked not to discuss the video or their evaluations.

### Curriculum

Course components were led by 2 instructors (A.K.G. and B.C.D.) and are detailed in Table 1. The course is divided into 4 overarching themes as follows: background, asking questions, assessment, and putting it all together, with evidence-based strategies and methods highlighted throughout. In part I participants were provided with an introduction to structured interviews, including discussion of essential characteristics, comparisons with traditional/unstructured interviews, validity evidence supporting their use, and data regarding applicant perceptions. The course then provided an overview of how questions are developed in structured interviews and common biases prevalent among interviewers.

Part II consisted of topics pertaining to asking questions in interviews, including techniques to obtain complete responses from applicants, types of questions and when to use them, unacceptable and illegal questions (e.g., asking

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