

Students' attitudes towards peer assessment of professionalism: A multi-centre Study

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Background

Undergraduate medical students in the UK are expected to meet numerous guidelines relating to their professional behaviour as specified by the GMC¹. This guidance includes objectively appraising and assessing the performance of their colleagues². Little is known about how students perceive and understand these requirements, and the impact this has on their learning experience.

Summary of work

72 undergraduate students from 2 schools participated in 13 focus groups. Data were analysed using a grounded theory approach³.

Summary of results

Focus group themes were: the context for appraising the professional behaviour of peers, the appropriate disclosure of peer appraisal, how students justified their peer appraisals, the importance of feedback for personal reflection, the importance of good role models, the teaching of professional behaviours and lifelong learning.

Conclusions

Students understood the importance of peer appraisal as part of their professional development, although they did have reservations about delivering constructive feedback face to face. Students suggest that professional behaviour is subjective, therefore teaching and appraising professionalism is context dependent –e.g. if its on clinical placement, in a classroom setting or even on virtual environments then the feedback will be different.

Take-home message

Students need to understand why they are appraising peers, and how this impacts upon their professional development and personal reflection