

MRANZCOG Oral Examination Communication Stations



The Royal Australian
and New Zealand
College of Obstetricians
and Gynaecologists

Good communication is critical to successful obstetric and gynaecological practice, to communicate effectively with a patient who may be very anxious or emotional, tests our skills. As an indication of its importance, the MRANZCOG Oral Examination has two stations where candidates are assessed on their communication skills. These stations consist of a clinical scenario with an actor playing the part of the patient. Different situations will be created such as the candidate having to break bad news, or deal with a patient who is distressed (may be sad, angry and/or guilty) about an adverse outcome, or explaining a diagnosis and treatment in a manner which the patient can comprehend.

These communication stations present a challenge to the examination candidates. Candidates need to change their mindset from a rapid communication of facts to the examiner on the other stations; to a slower, gentler considered approach at the communication stations.

Communication stations will evaluate a range of skills which include:

- Establishing and maintaining rapport
- Using appropriate body language
- Demonstrating respect and consideration towards the patient
- Using effective oral communication skills
- Providing honest, realistic and positive responses

How may these skills be demonstrated?

Establishing and maintaining rapport

- Candidate introducing him/herself to patient
- Using the patient's name
- Asking the patient if they require support for this encounter
- Relating to the patient in an engaging, sensitive and caring manner
- Treating the patient with respect at all times
- Allowing the patient adequate opportunity to relate her history and express her feelings
- Appropriately responding if the patient is distressed or worried
- Demonstration and expression of empathy
- Reassurance where appropriate

Using appropriate body language

- Making eye contact and smiling upon meeting
- Facing the patient when talking to her
- Leaning towards the patient when communicating (listening or talking)
- Facial expression to demonstrate interest, concern or smiling when appropriate
- Nodding appropriately as support or acknowledgement when patient is speaking

Demonstrating respect and consideration towards patient

- Listening with patience and interest to the woman's concerns
- Considering the role of legal guardianship if relevant to the case
- Allowing the patient to react emotionally to the clinical situation
- Acknowledging cultural differences and acts in accordance with the patient's cultural beliefs
- Demonstrating sensitivity to patient diversity (e.g. sexuality, economic, religious)
- Using appropriate language (not slang or derogatory terms)
- Avoiding condescension, not talking down to the patient
- Not talking over the patient
- Offering a patient centred approach:
 - Recognising her right to be involved in decision making regarding choice of treatment based on her own needs (such as cultural requirements, beliefs, feelings, financial circumstances and available support)

Using effective oral communication skills

- Listening carefully and thoughtfully
- Encouraging the patient to tell her story, express her concerns and emotions
- Speaking gently and clearly in a calm manner
- Using tone correctly
- Tolerating silence when appropriate (e.g. with grief)
- Communicating when the patient is ready
- Communicating only relevant and appropriate information
- Using appropriate language that the patient can understand (e.g. avoiding medical jargon)
- Providing accurate information
- Providing information in appropriate size "bytes"
- Addressing issues raised step by step
- Allowing the patient to absorb what has been said before moving onto the next point
- Checking the patient's understanding during conversation
- Encouraging the patient to ask questions
- Sensitively asking appropriate follow-up questions to better understand the patient's circumstances, clinical history or concerns

Providing honest, realistic and positive responses

- Giving honest, realistic and complete answers to the patient's questions
- Using positive language
- Avoiding blaming patient or implying criticism
- Avoiding a defensive approach
- Ensuring the patient's concerns are addressed
- Reassurance (when appropriate)
- Addressing the patient's clinical expectations in realistic terms
- Acknowledging a range of management options (where appropriate)
- Providing a summary of discussion and encouraging patient involvement in negotiating a way forward for management

Most of this list has been drawn from criteria which have been used by examiners in assessing candidates at previous examinations. The list is extensive and candidates will need to use techniques which are appropriate to the cases they are given. Examiners wish to see the candidate engage with the patient (actor) in an interested, respectful and caring manner. Listening well is a very important communication skill. Good candidates listen to and address the patient's needs. The mark allocation for the communication stations is weighed heavily for communication skills.

Trainees should consider incorporating these skills, and those that they learn at the communication workshops into their clinical practice. It is expected that they will find this rewarding both by assisting with patient management and in their examination preparation.