

Language assessment of health professionals: the issue of communicative competence

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Overview

1. The Occupational English Test (OET)
2. What is meant by “communicative competence”?
3. The challenges of working in a multilingual healthcare setting
4. What is clinical communication?
5. Incorporation of clinical communication into the OET

About OET

- designed specifically to test the English language competence of healthcare professionals
- four components: listening, reading, writing, speaking
- productive components are profession-specific
- 12 professions: medicine, dentistry, dietetics, nursing, occupational therapy, optometry, pharmacy, physiotherapy, podiatry, radiography, speech pathology, veterinary science

- 20 minutes total
- 2 role plays
- recorded via DVR
- 'lay' interlocutor

Separate role cards
for **candidate** and
interlocutor

| OET MAY 2011 | |
|-----------------------|--|
| ROLEPLAYER CARD NO. 6 | MEDICINE |
| SETTING | Suburban Clinic |
| PATIENT | You're the parent of 5-year-old Matthew. You present to your doctor as follow-up from an emergency consultation two days ago when he was newly diagnosed with asthma. For the past month, he has been having frequent attacks with coughing and has trouble breathing when running around. Last week, Matthew developed a cold with low-grade fever and two nights ago he had a severe bout of coughing, breathing difficulty and wheezing. You took him to the Emergency Department where he was treated with nebulized salbutamol and then discharged. |
| TASK | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• You have little understanding of asthma and ask your doctor: "What is asthma? Will Matthew always have this condition?"• You are frightened that Matthew might have a severe attack and you seek advice on how to manage Matthew's asthma.• Can the doctor help in any other way? |
| SECRET ONLINE | MAY 2011 |

| OET MAY 2011 | |
|----------------------|--|
| CANDIDATE CARD NO. 6 | MEDICINE |
| SETTING | Suburban Clinic |
| DOCTOR | A parent presents with his/her five-year-old son, Matthew, as follow-up after an emergency consultation two days ago when Matthew was newly diagnosed with asthma. Then, Matthew experienced a severe bout of coughing, breathing difficulty and wheezing on the background of a cold with low-grade fever. The parent felt frightened so took Matthew to the hospital Emergency Department where he was treated with nebulized salbutamol. The parent has little understanding of asthma and is very anxious about how to manage asthma. |
| TASK | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Explain asthma to the parent (narrowing of airways in lungs). Describe some of the symptoms (e.g., shortness of breath, wheezing).• Explain 2-3 management points (e.g., how to identify and control trigger factors; assess severity of symptoms; respond in an urgent situation; ensure school is informed and salbutamol available there).• Reassure the parent by explaining that prognosis is good if the parent understands the triggers and knows exactly what to do in an acute situation (you will support by developing an Asthma Action Plan and arranging early review). |
| SECRET ONLINE | MAY 2011 |

Assessor listens to
recording online



Candidate takes role
of health professional



Interlocutor
takes the role of
the patient

MARKING

- 1-2 weeks post-test
- 2 *different* assessors
- via rating scale

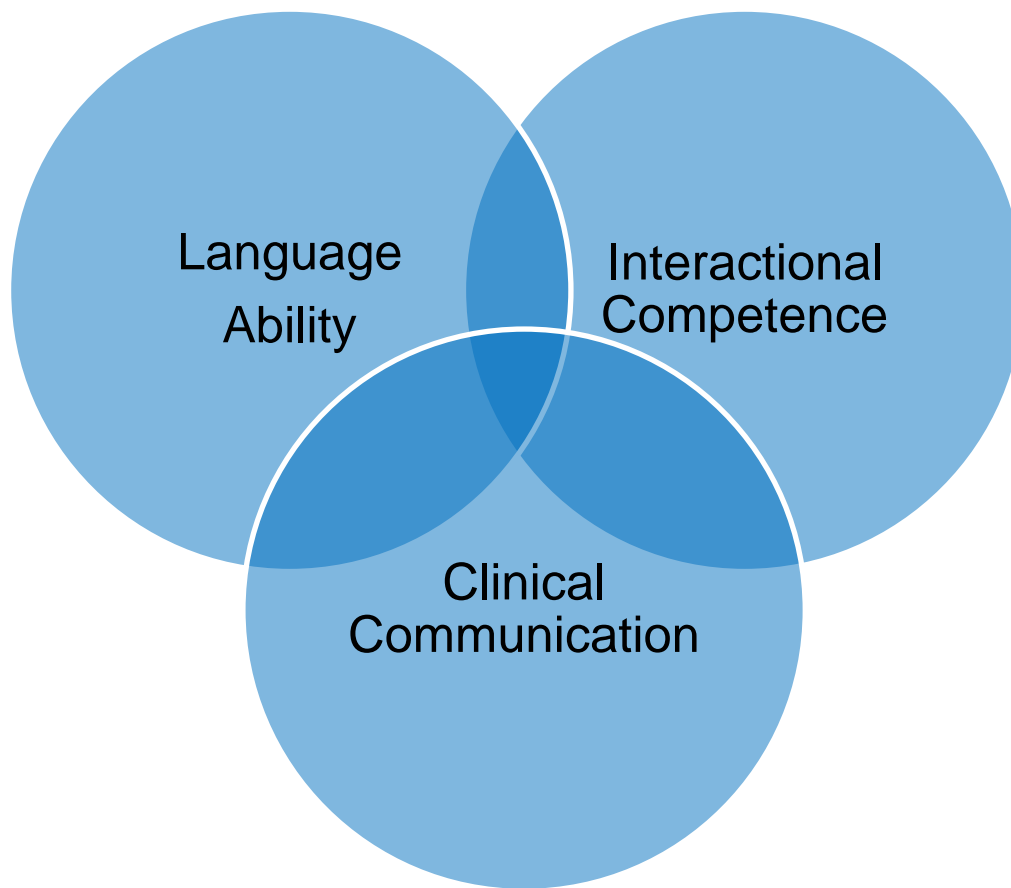
Assessment criteria

- Overall Communicative Effectiveness
- Intelligibility
- Fluency
- Appropriateness of Language
- Resources of Grammar and Expression

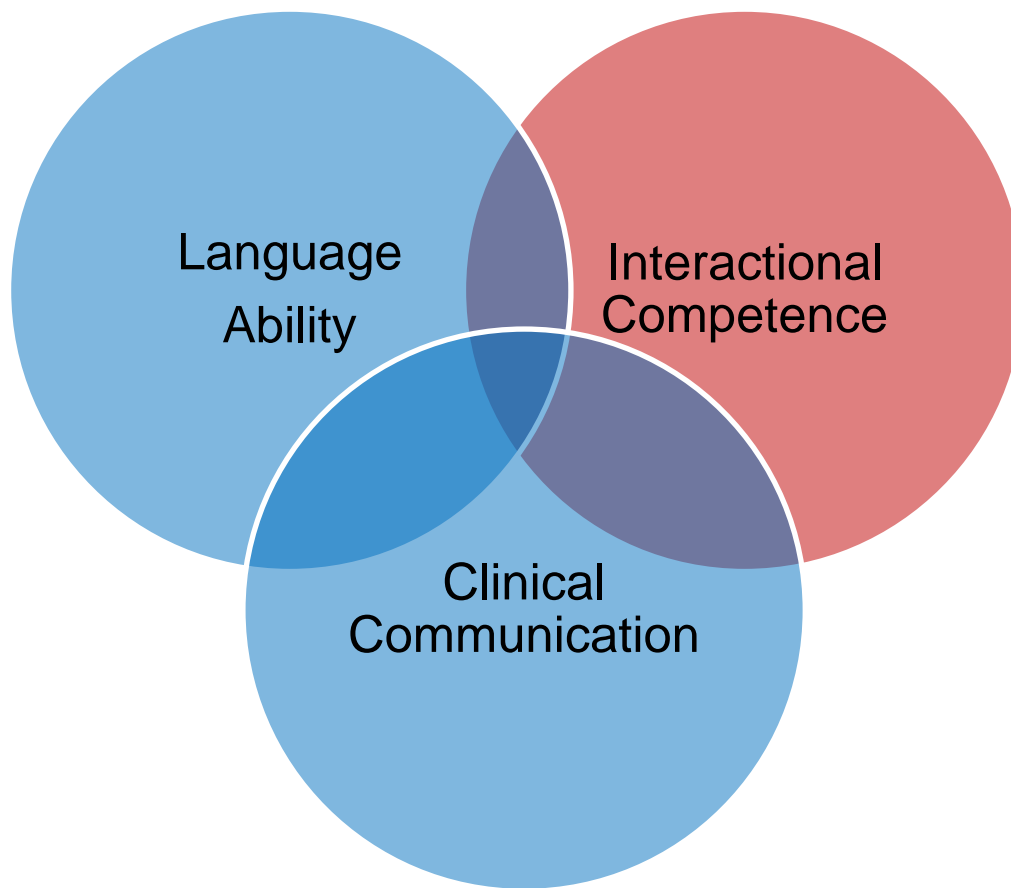
Communication vs language testing

- communication involves not only speaking but also active listening and encouraging
- highly interactive
- non-verbal
- making space for the patient
- patient-centred

Communicative competence



Communicative competence



Interactional competence

On a macro level:

- co-constructing interaction in a purposeful and meaningful way
- taking into account socio-cultural and pragmatic dimensions of the speech situation.

On a micro level:

- aspects of *topic management, turn management, interactive listening, breakdown repair* and *non-verbal behaviours*.

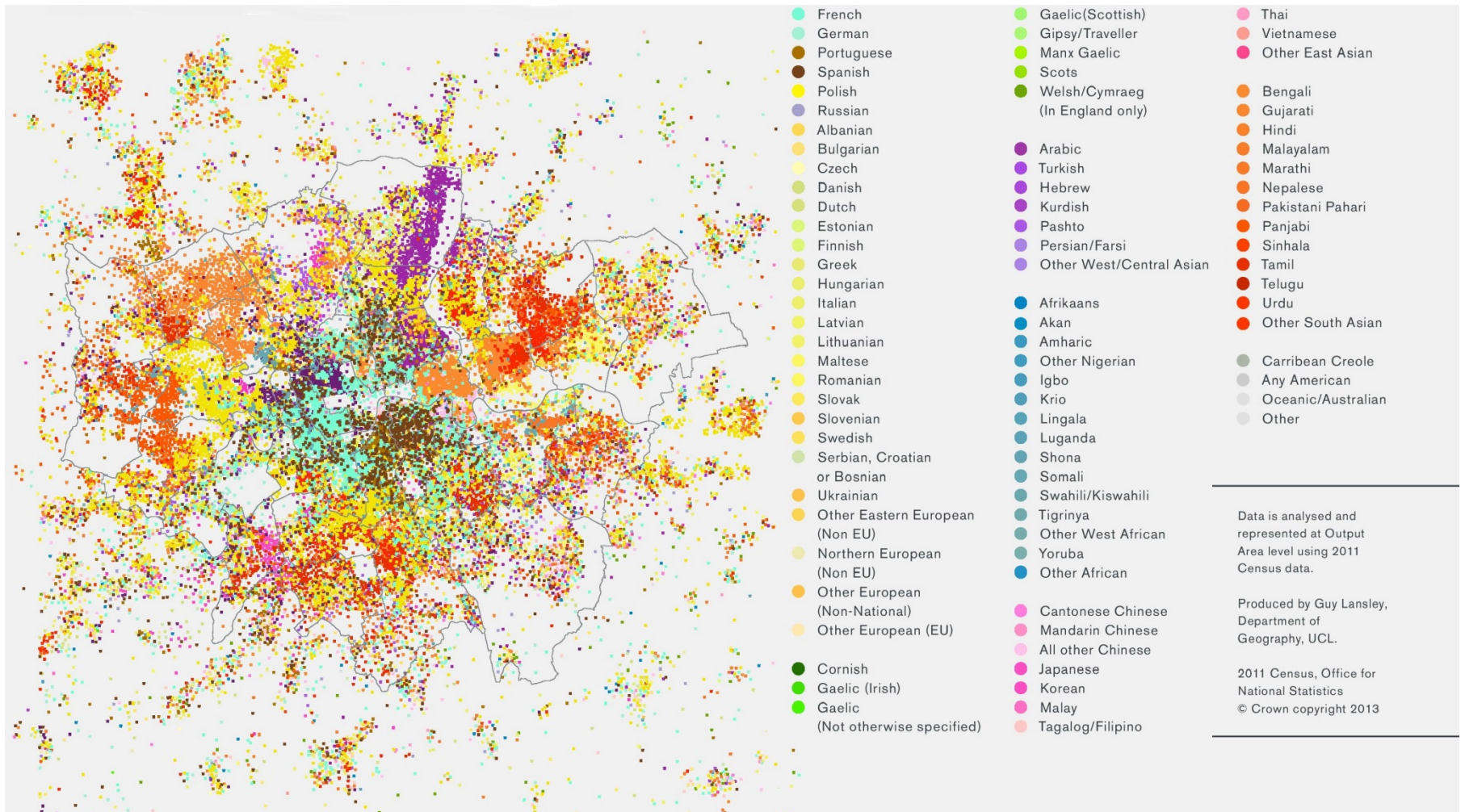
The issue of authenticity

- **interactional authenticity:** how candidates engage with the test task. Do they draw on context-relevant language skills?
- **situational authenticity:** the degree of correspondence between the test and the non-test domain

Roberts and Moss (2003): “Doing the Lambeth talk: real life GP/patient encounters in the multi-lingual city”

- 232 video recordings in 19 inner London general practices
- to identify how patients consult with general practitioners (GPs) and develop training strategies
- 30 languages other than English reported as patients’ first or dominant language
- 20% of all consultations with non-native speakers contained misunderstandings caused by breakdowns in communication

Multilingualism in London





ONE NHS, MANY NATIONALITIES

Number of NHS staff in England reporting each nationality, June 2017

Data: NHS Digital. Graphic by @commonslibrary - read more at tinyurl.com/nhsnationality

| | | | | | |
|---------------|---------|----------------|-----|-----------------|-----|
| British | 968,760 | Swedish | 682 | Libyan | 150 |
| Indian | 18,252 | New Zealand | 608 | Eritrean | 147 |
| Philippine | 15,037 | Trinidadian | 595 | Congolese | 147 |
| Irish | 13,013 | Bangladeshi | 587 | Syrian | 146 |
| Polish | 8,339 | Sierra Leonean | 511 | Tanzanian | 144 |
| Spanish | 6,979 | Ugandan | 480 | Guyanese | 143 |
| Portuguese | 6,771 | Sudanese | 469 | Jordanian | 141 |
| Italian | 6,061 | Zambian | 469 | Afghan | 135 |
| Nigerian | 5,314 | Latvian | 439 | Slovenian | 130 |
| Zimbabwean | 3,909 | Cypriot | 415 | Nigerien | 124 |
| Romanian | 3,716 | Finnish | 374 | Colombian | 108 |
| Pakistani | 3,370 | Danish | 368 | Barbadian | 105 |
| Greek | 2,959 | Belgian | 354 | Albanian | 96 |
| German | 2,374 | Brazilian | 348 | Korean | 94 |
| Ghanaian | 2,342 | Iranian | 342 | Ethiopian | 90 |
| Malaysian | 2,122 | Austrian | 335 | Central African | 90 |
| Australian | 2,014 | Singaporean | 321 | Serbian | 86 |
| Jamaican | 1,704 | Maltese | 308 | Hong Kong | 82 |
| South African | 1,641 | Iraqi | 288 | Algerian | 79 |
| Dutch | 1,540 | Thai | 280 | Saint Lucian | 72 |
| French | 1,526 | Croatian | 268 | Israeli | 67 |
| Nepalese | 1,521 | Burmese | 261 | Indonesian | 66 |
| Sri Lankan | 1,259 | Cameroonian | 252 | Fijian | 55 |
| Mauritian | 1,234 | Somali | 250 | Lebanese | 53 |
| Hungarian | 1,181 | Mauritanian | 243 | Bruneian | 52 |
| American | 1,164 | Japanese | 227 | Moroccan | 51 |
| Lithuanian | 1,115 | Norwegian | 226 | Rwandan | 49 |
| Egyptian | 1,026 | Gambian | 207 | Grenadian | 49 |
| Bulgarian | 982 | Malawian | 205 | Ivorian | 48 |
| Canadian | 810 | Russian | 183 | Motswana | 46 |
| Slovak | 801 | Turkish | 172 | Mexican | 44 |
| Chinese | 768 | Swiss | 162 | Peruvian | 44 |
| Kenyan | 705 | Ukrainian | 160 | Venezuelan | 43 |
| Czech | 692 | Estonian | 159 | Liberian | 40 |

- 12.4% of NHS staff report a non-British nationality
- A total of 202 nationalities
- Doctors: India, Pakistan, Egypt, Nigeria and Greece
- Nurses: Philippines, India, Ireland, Spain and Portugal

The setting

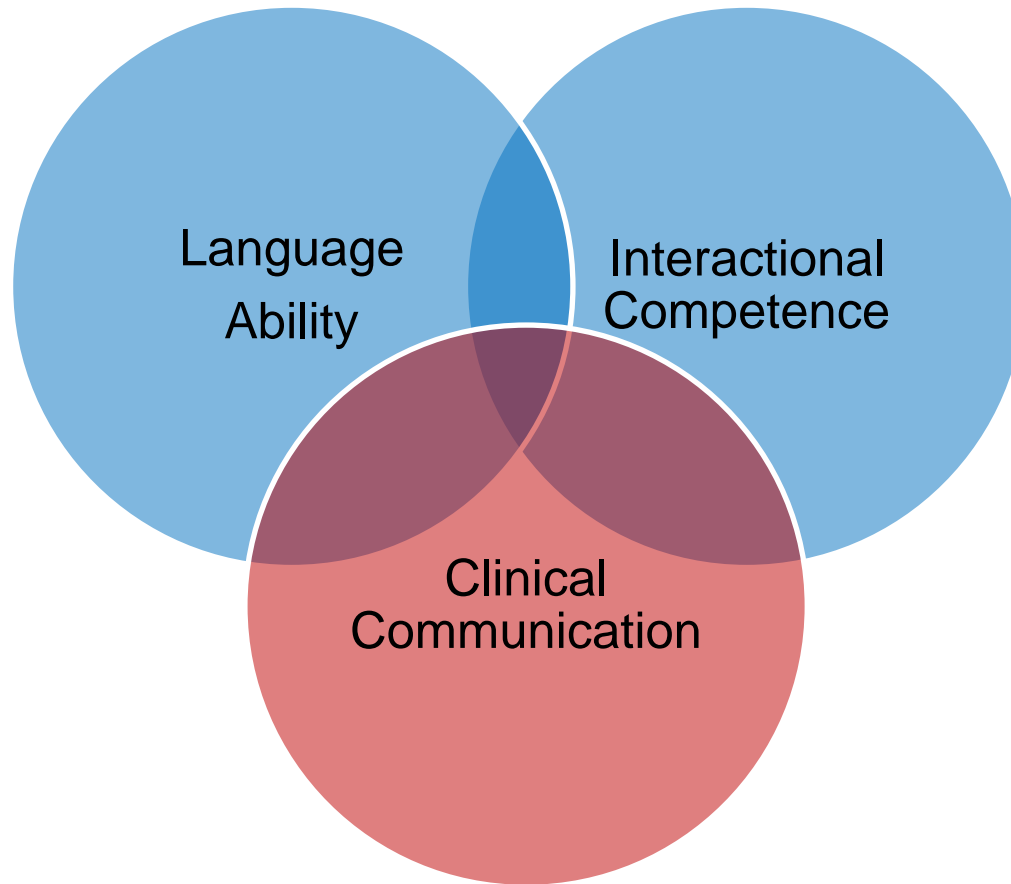
- Super-diversity: “*diversity within diversity*”, characterised by mobility, complexity and unpredictability (Vertovec 2007)
- “*more people from more places migrated into more and different places and for more and different reasons and motives than before; and the outcomes was an escalation of ethnic, social, cultural and economic diversity in societies almost everywhere*” (Vertovec 2010)

Impact on public policies and practices

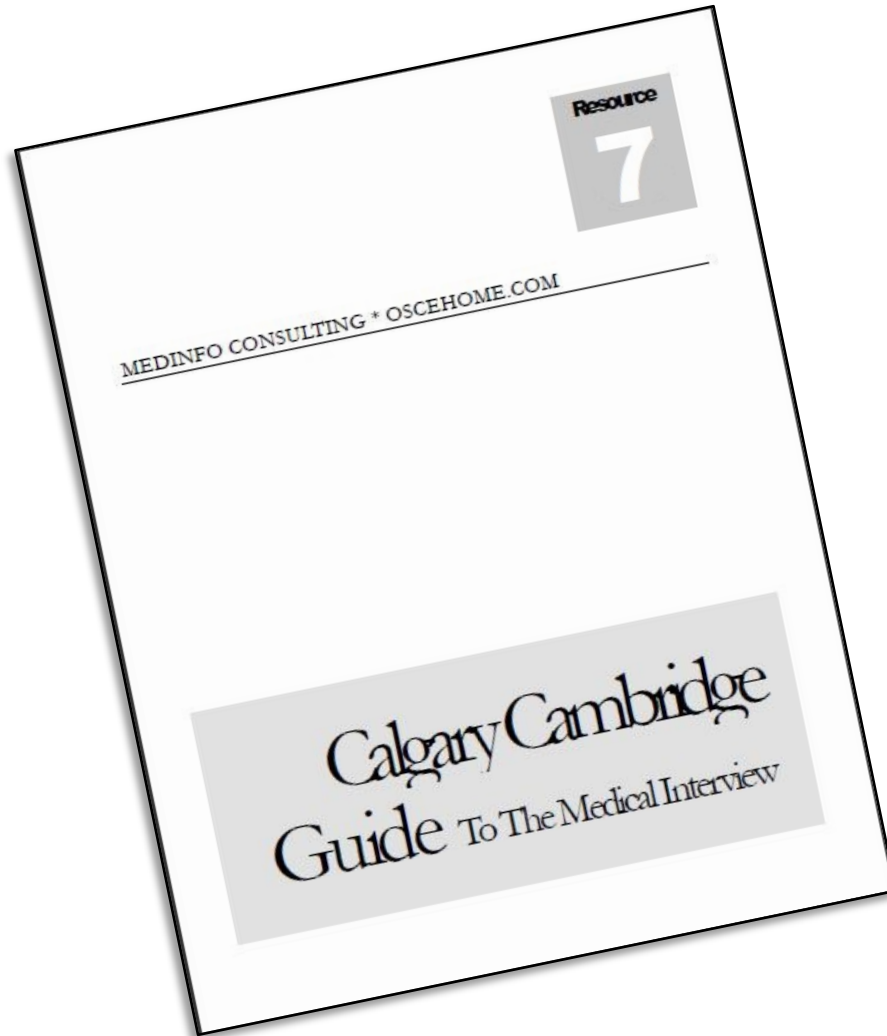
*“Clearly no ‘knowledge based’ training can prepare [health] professionals for all the issues that ever increasing diversity creates. Learning **generic skills** to respond flexibly to all encounters is more appropriate. In other words, responding to each patient as an individual, with individual needs, and to variations in patients’ culture in its **broadest sense**”.*

Kai (2003: 33)

Communicative competence



Clinical communication skills



Clinical communication and OET

1. Research project by Language Testing Research Centre (LTRC) at the University of Melbourne
 2. Checklist reviewed by Dr Jonathan Silverman
 3. Standards setting and examiner trial
- Clinical communication to be assessed alongside linguistically-oriented criteria from September 2018

Clinical communication skills

1. Relationship-building
2. Understanding the Patient's Perspective
3. Providing Structure
4. Information-gathering
5. Information-giving

Standard setting

- 13 judges were played 14 audio-recorded test performances
- high consensus for Speaking – out of a maximum score of 30:
 - 8 judges selected a score of 18
 - 3 judges selected a score of 17
 - 2 judges selected a score of 19
- high level of confidence in judgment

Assessor trial feedback

“Assessing clinical communication skills is the missing link under the current assessment criteria situation.”

“It will be a fairer test if these aspects of communication are included.”

“[...] I believe that these criteria have the potential to improve the test validity.”

Why include clinical communication?

- ✓ improve test authenticity
- ✓ immediate washback
- ✓ positive impact on stakeholders and society more generally
- ✓ framework for managing consultations in a multilingual, multi-ethnic and multi-cultural environment

THANK YOU!

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