

Authentic evaluation of communication skills by a video assignment for preclinical veterinary students

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Objectives: to evaluate a video assignment for authentic assessment of communication skills and to describe veterinary students' perceptions of their own skills.

Methods: 193 pre-clinical veterinary students performed a compulsory assignment, which consisted of recruiting a volunteer/animal owner, videotaping a 5-10 minute conversation and writing a self-reflective essay. They had received four lectures on the Calgary-Cambridge Guide framework for veterinary consultations before. Students had to gather information about environment, lifestyle and past medical history of the animal, and about client's perspective such as human-animal bond. Student and owner informed consent were obtained.

Findings: 189 students completed the assignment. Six skills were rated by the lecturer based on the video: non-verbal behaviour, questioning technique, passive listening e.g. not interrupting, active listening e.g. summarising, active exploration and empathy. The median score for non-verbal behaviour, questioning technique and passive listening was good, while empathy rated lowest. The self-reflective essays were analysed for the same topics: non-verbal behaviour (mentioned in 93.2% of essays), questioning technique (91.6%), passive listening (60.0%), active listening (60.0%), active exploration (50.5%) and empathy (39.5%). Student feedback on the assignment (n=101) indicated that it was valuable for 76.2% of students while 10.9% thought it was not valuable and 12.9% preferred an alternative approach, such as roleplay.

Discussion: Video recordings in an authentic setting are a valuable assignment providing insight into the students' own communication skills. Empathy statements were absent in most recordings and were not reflected upon by most students, although empathic opportunities were present in the majority of conversations.