

Sector-leading training for pharmacists, physician associates and paramedics

In November 2022, over 50 pharmacists, physician associates and paramedics across Operose Health took part in what we believe is probably the largest single Objective Structured Clinical Excellence (OSCE) session in primary care. Designed and delivered in-house by senior leaders in their field, the OSCEs test and improve the clinical diagnosis and management of illnesses for allied health professionals (AHPs) through exams and real-life act scenarios.

Taking place in 2018 and 2019, our OSCE's were paused during the last two years due to social distancing restrictions during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Bilkis Akhtar, our Head of Learning and Development, has overall responsibility for delivering the OSCEs.

“These OSCEs provide so many opportunities for our AHP colleagues to test themselves, to learn and develop. They may have been wondering how to do a safeguarding referral, increase their knowledge on a specific topic or improve the way they interact with patients. The OSCEs give these opportunities with immediate feedback from senior colleagues.

“We lost the chance to do in-person training due to the pandemic, so it's great to bring it back, and this time even bigger and better. As well as helping individuals, the OSCEs also identify learning gaps across the Group to work on. It was fantastic to witness them in action and the buy-in at every level was amazing.”

The OSCEs involved a one hour written exam developed by our own GPs, followed by six 'live' scenarios to test skills in patient consultations. Each scenario had input from our senior clinicians, lead pharmacists and physician associates who also designed the marking scheme. These were double checked by a GP Director and our Regional Medical Directors.

Croydon's Regional Medical Director Dr Rizwan Irshad, who is also the clinical lead for the OSCEs, created many of the scenarios which were then developed by the lead pharmacists and physician associates. Dr Irshad was on-hand throughout the day.

“This OSCE taught us so much about what needs to be worked on with our AHPs. Covid and social distancing protocols meant that staff have had fewer opportunities to examine patients over the past two years. In fact, there were some AHPs who had qualified and joined the organisation during the pandemic, so they had not been able to carry-out certain types of clinical examinations before.

“A broad spectrum of medical fields were covered and the stations tested both the communication and clinical skills of our AHPs. We also tested their knowledge through our exam paper. Clinical leads now have much more information about the

knowledge gaps for each AHP they support and supervise, so they can do focussed work to upskill and develop them.

“This is a unique and innovative way to find out learning needs at scale and very effective.”

The scenarios included face-to-face and telephone consultations with colleagues acting as patients. The aim was to improve the diagnosis and management of acute conditions and chronic conditions in real time, as well as to test the knowledge of medication reviews, safeguarding, [sepsis](#), [depression](#), dyspepsia and [chronic obstructive pulmonary disease](#) (COPD).

Pharmacist Mehdi Hilli took part in the day and welcomed the inclusion of both the practical and theoretical components. Mehdi said: “It was an excellent learning experience. The day ran smoothly and it included the feeling of nerves that you get during university exams, so it brings back memories. The stations were really interesting and the feedback that we got was very helpful, as we come across these scenarios in our everyday working life.”

This was Regional Medical Director Dr Anna Reed’s first experience of being involved in an OSCE at Operose Health:

“I was very impressed by the organisation of the OSCEs and all the prep work that went into the event. I felt the clinical cases were challenging but achievable for the AHPs.

“It was a fantastic learning experience for me as an examiner. I was able to better understand the skill mix across our organisation and develop my knowledge around where my AHP colleagues may need support from more experienced clinicians. The debrief sessions with the simulated patients and examiners were very helpful in identifying patterns and areas where all candidates struggled or shone, which will shape future teaching sessions.

“It was also lovely to meet colleagues from across the wider team and meet a few people in real life who have previously only existed on Teams or at the end of the phone.”

Each station consultation lasted for 12 minutes and candidates received instant feedback from our GPs, lead pharmacists and lead physician associates in person. All attendees received their exam results, a report on their OSCE experience and examiner feedback.

Physician associate Hussein Nassrallah, who has been with us for 18 months, was taking part in his first OSCE. “I thought the day was useful, particularly in highlighting areas that need further work. I also really appreciated the detailed feedback provided on the report.”

Conor Brokenshire, a physician associate also in his second year with us, found the whole OSCE experience constructive: “I thought the day went well. We were given

presentations that come up every day in my practice, as well as some rarer scenarios which were important to review.”

Zakya Dawood joined Operose Health in January 2017 at the start of her second year as a physician associate. She is now the Regional Lead Physician Associate for North Central London and is based at one of our practices in Islington. During her career with us, Zakya has experienced OSCEs from both sides of the fence.

“Being a part of the team that helped with the OSCEs was a great learning experience for me. I reviewed the exam paper to ensure that the questions were suitable for PAs. I wrote a station scenario for the OSCEs and was an examiner for one of the OSCE stations. Prior to this year's examination, I was on the other side - a PA that sat the exams - and so was aware of the nervousness of the AHPs and was able to really appreciate this when assessing them.

“The OSCEs allowed me to see areas of improvement that were required, which would allow the learning team to develop teaching sessions to help fill these gaps. This examination process is very unique to our organisation, and as a PA I find that these exams help consolidate our knowledge in preparation for the national recertification examination that PAs need to sit every six years.

Summing up the OSCEs from a clinical perspective, Dr Lucy Goodeve-Docker, Co-Regional Medical Director for Lambeth said:

“From my perspective, it’s an opportunity to assess our AHPs and provides a great insight into the high level of clinical knowledge and skills we have across the organisation. It also allows us to reflect on areas where we could provide more education and support.

“Personally, I enjoyed having time to engage with my colleagues in a more relaxed forum, as well as providing constructive feedback to broaden their knowledge base. Not only was I impressed with the clinicians I assessed, but I was also delighted to see a PCN pharmacist, who was not directly employed by us, attend for her own training purposes which she found incredibly useful.”

Bilkis and her team are already planning for the 2023 OSCEs, taking on board the feedback from participants this year. “It’s a lot of hard work but I’m really pleased with this year’s OSCE’s. I’m really keen to see even more colleagues taking part this year, especially from our national sites, so we will be promoting the OSCEs more widely this year. Our regional medical directors and clinical leads will also help bang the drum, alongside developing new exams and station scenarios for this year’s OSCEs to test the skills of our amazing AHPs.”

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