

## 16th International Health Workforce Collaborative Conference

### The role of healthcare-specific language proficiency in patient centred care - OET case study

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#### Introduction

Demographic trends including ageing populations and chronic health conditions are putting pressure on healthcare systems in many English-speaking countries (WHO, 2013), where an increasing number of foreign trained healthcare professionals are being recruited to fill skill shortages (OECD, 2016). This large scale global mobility of healthcare professionals has made English language proficiency critical to safeguarding patient safety and quality of care.

A review of patient complaints in healthcare systems published in the BMJ and International Journal for Quality in Health Care found the most common issue, after 'treatment' (15.6%), is 'communication' (13.7%). (**Reader, 2014**). In addition, a recent paper published by healthcare accreditation organisation, Joint Commission International (JCI) states: "research shows that human failures cause 80% to 90% of errors. The most common root causes of sentinel events are human factors, leadership, and communication" (JCI, 2015).

This poster presents research carried out on OET (Vidakovic, 2013), a healthcare specific English test, and how it establishes workplace readiness for foreign trained healthcare professionals in Australia.

#### Objectives

The purpose of this study is to seek stakeholders' perceptions with regard to the appropriateness of the Occupational English Test (OET) to the healthcare sector, and to examine the extent to which OET is a good indicator of workplace readiness in terms of language proficiency.

#### Population studied

Stakeholders in this study consist of: OET test takers, teachers who prepare candidates for OET, employers and healthcare regulatory bodies.

#### Research questions

- What is the intended impact of using an English for Specific Purposes test, namely OET, when assessing the language ability of healthcare professionals?
- To what extent is OET an appropriate language examination for the health sector in terms of its construct validity (i.e. content, skills/abilities assessed, format)?
- To what extent are OET test takers perceived as ready for the workplace in terms of their English language ability?

#### Methods

Qualitative and quantitative data were simultaneously collected in a mixed methods research design (MMRD). The analysis of each data strand was carried out independent of the other but when interpreting the results information was drawn from both strands. Qualitative data collection instruments comprised interviews with representatives of healthcare regulatory bodies in Australia. Surveys were used in the quantitative analyses.

#### Findings

Several themes emerged with regard to the strengths gained and demonstrated by OET test takers within the workplace. OET test takers are perceived as effective communicators who are able to communicate with stakeholders in the healthcare sector on matters that are both technical and emotional and who can use lay language so that patients can easily understand what they are saying.

**Policy implications and conclusion**

Language proficiency and communication skills are a critical component of patient-centred care. One policy implication for participating countries at the IHWC is: Will a healthcare specific English language test better equip foreign trained healthcare professionals to provide quality and safe care?