Terminal Evaluation
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Paramedic education is (or should be) competency based. This implies frequent evaluation of each student to determine competency, both at the formative and summative stages**. Formative assessment occurs throughout the program of study**: in the classroom using cognitive instruments; in the laboratory documenting skill mastery; in the clinical arena under the supervision of preceptors; and in the field internship as the student progresses from team member to team leader. Programs are also required to assess competency in the terminal phase of the program.

An increasingly common scenario encountered by CoAEMSP site visitors is the program that administers a 'final' cognitive exam at the end of the classroom portion of the program and then sends students to the clinical setting and/or the field internship and never administers a final competency assessment at program completion. The usual rationale is to give the 'final' exam before the students forget the material! However, the clinical and field internship should solidify cognitive learning and increase the student's critical thinking skills.

The *Standards Interpretation* document for *Standard* IV.A.1. states: "Achievement of the competencies required for graduation must be assessed by program criterion-referenced, summative, comprehensive final evaluations. Summative program evaluation is a capstone event that occurs after all components of the program are complete. Summative comprehensive evaluation must include cognitive, psychomotor, and affective domains."

So how is this put into practice? The **summative program evaluation is an exit** exam and should, at a minimum, include cognitive assessment and evaluation of skill or scenario based psychomotor and critical thinking performance. Comprehensive, of course, infers a sampling of all course content and not just the most recent semester. Other additional options that some programs incorporate include a final oral examination with the Program's Medical Director and/or faculty or a final graded clinical shift with the Medical Director. However, the summative program evaluation does not preclude a program from administering a comprehensive evaluation/examination prior to entry into field internship to assess if the student is academically prepared for this next phase.

As a terminal evaluation event:

- All components of the summative evaluation are administered following delivery of all didactic course content, all laboratory and simulation events, and the clinical and field rotations.
- All of the above must be *successfully* completed prior to *exit* testing/evaluation.
- Occasionally a student may still have a limited number of clinical or field rotations to complete due to scheduling issues or availability. However, the number of shifts/hours should be limited.
- The option to allow retests and/or remediation is a program decision.
- The final evaluations are high-stakes exams and the student must achieve a 'passing' score in each exam (i.e., cognitive and psychomotor) to successfully exit the program and be eligible to sit for the National Registry or State certification examination The passing or cut score is established by the program.
- The traditional exit psychomotor examination has consisted of a series of skill stations, and perhaps one or two static scenarios. However, programs may instead choose to use well constructed scenario or simulation events to determine competency. The number of skills, stations, or scenarios is determined by the program and should be designed to determine competency at the entry Paramedic level.

Of course, cognitive instruments must be constantly evaluated for reliability and validity. If test banks are used, either commercial or program developed, item analysis is still required. Cohort results on terminal evaluations should be routinely compared to credentialing exams and the results analyzed, trends noted, and curriculum and formative exams should be revised as necessary.

Student success is crucial and the goal of evaluation should always be to measure competency: not just to 'pass the credentialing test!'