



THE PAEDIATRIC SOCIETY OF NEW ZEALAND

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The Pharmacy Council of New Zealand
PO Box 25137
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RE: New Assessments for Intern Pharmacists: A Consultation Document

We note that the accreditation standards for Intern Assessment have been developed in conjunction with the Australian Pharmacy Council (APC). In a recent review of these standards the APC recommended a trial of a multi-choice question (MCQ) exam and a modified OSCE as part of the assessment process.

The 2011 MCQ trial exam had an overall pass rate of 9/20 (< 50%), with the calculation section having the lowest pass rate of 12/20 candidates. Of the eight candidates that failed overall, six failed the calculation section, therefore the Council is questioning the appropriateness of including calculations in the Intern Assessment.

We strongly disagree with the removal of the calculation section of the MCQ, and answer the questions in 2.5.1 MCQ of the Consultation Document.

Is it important that interns demonstrate a level of competence in calculations in an exam?

The examination setting provides a rigorous form of testing a candidate's ability to undertake calculations accurately. Appropriate calculations can be chosen for the test and an accurate assessment can be made in a quantitative method.

What is the correct balance of questions to reflect the types of calculations encountered by hospital and community pharmacists in practice?

Many oral liquid medicines for children require the manufacture of a formulation which may have a component of calculations within the preparatory phase. These oral liquid formulations are used both in the hospital setting and the community therefore the same level of calculation competency is required.

In addition, competency for all pharmacists should be established in a variety of calculation scenarios eg rates of administration, percentages, unit conversions, and ratios.

Some hospital pharmacists will require a higher level of calculation competency, but this would be established at the time of screening an applicant for a position within the hospital.

Is the high stress environment of an exam an appropriate setting for testing calculations?

The high stress environment of an exam equates to the level of stress often experienced in both hospital and community practice when calculations are required to be undertaken accurately. In fact, an exam setting may be less stressful than a community pharmacy where the pharmacist may be consumed by other distractions such as answering phones, dealing with staff issues and customer requests.

Would it be appropriate for the calculation section to be removed from the MCQ exam?

We do not agree with the calculation section being removed from the MCQ exam. The Pharmacy profession must demonstrate a high level of competency across a range of appropriate topics, of which calculations are an integral part. The low pass rate for the calculation section of the trial MCQ exam may demonstrate a need to improve this component of the undergraduate programme.

It is vitally important that pharmacists are qualified to calculate a range of questions to ensure ongoing medication safety when dispensing medicines. This carries a greater weight when dispensing and advising the correct volume of medicine for children.

This letter is supported by members of the pharmacist and therapeutics special interest group of the Paediatric Society:

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