

OSCES for the MRCOG Made Easy, Volume 1

Editor **A Alexander Taylor**

This DVD and book combination is an excellent and innovative help for MRCOG oral examination candidates who need to develop familiarity with the OSCE format.

The six interactive stations involving role players are particularly realistic, and give a good feel for how these stations should (and should not) be conducted. The two stations for which both 'good' and 'bad' candidates' performances are shown have a helpful voice-over commentary. The related book chapters add more specific details of the appropriate or inappropriate vocabulary and body language used. I am not sure if these aspects are explained explicitly enough for the needs of MRCOG candidates who are not familiar with cultural norms and patient expectations in the UK, although I would expect a doctor who has had significant experience in the UK to be able to pick up what is being alluded to.

The one station illustrating an interaction directly with the examiner (discussing the use of a uterine balloon therapy system) is not a realistic representation of what a structured viva station in the examination itself would be like. The 'examiner' is silent until almost the end, whilst the candidate talks fluently and without pause, both of which are behaviours that are unlikely to happen in the actual examinations!

The station illustrating the candidate analysing and prioritising tasks at the start of a shift of duty on the labour ward is amusingly conducted. No doubt deliberately, it is played as a multi-charactered drama, rather than the one-to-one (candidate-to-examiner) structured viva, which is the format for this popular and well-known station in the examinations. This certainly conveys the concept that it is expected that in this examination candidates will demonstrate how they would undertake familiar and everyday tasks in the course of their normal work. However, the fact is that the practical constraints of the examinations necessarily transpose this particular task to a structured viva, preceded by a preparatory station,

so this particular scenario is less useful than it might have been.

I found the DVD scene and related book chapter entitled 'How to maximise your communication skills' both interesting and instructive. It gives a clear and practical analysis of the mechanisms of voice control and projection, with related warm-up exercises. However, the contents of this section do not provide all that is promised in the heading, and I look forward to this being expanded in a future volume. The aspects of performance that candidates for this examination (particularly those not familiar with living and working in the UK) find most difficult are the details of language and non-verbal communications that are appropriate (or inappropriate) in the relevant circumstances.

The one criticism of this package is that the marking schemes given for each station are not in the style used in the current examinations. The fact that stations are actually each marked out of a potential total of 20 (rather than 10) is easily corrected. However, the OSCE subcommittee makes a particular point of constructing marking schemes for this component of the examinations which assess characteristics such as communication skills, problem solving abilities, analytical skills, professionalism, and understanding of audit and research methods. The marking schemes given in this production tend to focus too much on factual knowledge, which the Examinations Committee aims to assess in the written examinations rather than in the orals.

This is a marvellous tool, which will be welcomed by anxious oral examination candidates and their trainers. The DVD format makes it particularly easy to use. Much care, skill and hard work have gone into this production, and I look forward to seeing future volumes.

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