Clinical Evaluation: Concepts and Processes

Objectives
- Review concepts applied in the evaluation of clinical performance
- Discuss factors that impact the fair and legal evaluation of students
- Determine the relationship of standards to evaluating clinical competence
- Review the contracts schools make with students and their related implications
- Examine strategies that support students whose clinical performance is unsatisfactory
- Describe the clinical evaluation process and the rights of students for due process

Clinical Evaluation
Faculty have the legal and ethical responsibility to pass only students who are safe practitioners and meet the clinical objectives of the course.

Clinical Evaluation — Assumptions
- “Evaluation is a process by which judgments are made about performance.”
- Since nursing judgment is a subjective process based on data, it is important to remember that no matter how hard an educator tries . . .
- “Clinical evaluation is NOT objective.”
- “The teacher’s values influence evaluation.”
  (Oermann & Gaberson, 2014)

Faculty Self-Awareness
- Recognize personal values and biases
- Recognize attitudes towards students who are “outside perceived norm” (dress, gender, age)
- Accept differences and open self to new perspectives
- Emphasize professionalism without attacking personal characteristics
- While clinical evaluation is filtered through our personal perspectives, clinical guidelines should be used to grade in a fair manner

Subjectivity and Fairness
Faculty should develop a fair system that:
- Acknowledges their personal values
- Uses pre-determined objectives or competencies
- Provides supportive learning environment
  (Oermann & Gaberson 2014)
College Contract with Student
- Information provided by the school regarding criteria to be met for graduation constitutes a contract with a student
- Information provided by a course syllabus regarding criteria to be met for satisfactory completion of the course constitutes a contract with a student
- Important for faculty to be familiar with all college documents that constitute a contract with students

Student-Related Policies
- Student-related policies should be available in a formal document such as the student handbook
- Documentation must be maintained that students have received this information
- Policies that should be included:
  - Progression, retention and graduation
  - Academic standards (grading scale, appeal/grievance policy)
  - Conduct
- Policies should be reviewed at the beginning of each course and reflected in the syllabus
  - Syllabus should contain:
    - Course description, objectives, credit hours
    - Course faculty along with contact information
    - Class schedule/deadlines and attendance policies
    - Evaluation criteria/tools/methods and standards
    - May also require faculty notification of need for accommodations

Clinical Standards Must Be:
- Clear and understandable
- Reflective of the student’s expected level of performance
- Applied consistently
  - (O’Connor, 2015)

Clinical Evaluation
- Clinical objectives should be clear with observable and measurable behaviors identified
- Clinical evaluation tool should be provided at the beginning of the course along with information regarding its use
- Clinical objectives set by each course should show progression beginning with fundamentally appropriate expectations
- Schedule for evaluations should be set at the beginning of the course
Acquisition of Clinical Knowledge: Novice Learners
- Students are “novice” nurses and work from facts and context-free rules
- Have little to no experience in situations in which they are performing
- Preparation involves learning facts and rules
- Students require time, repetition and guidance to be able to assimilate theory into practice and “put things together” (i.e. think critically) (Benner, 1984)

Create Supportive Environment
- Students learn in public (lab, clinical) and feel like they are being evaluated all the time
- Stress decreases many students’ performance
  - Structure course so students have opportunity to practice skills prior to client care and orient to unit
  - Assign appropriate clients to students
  - Provide student feedback in private
  - Display approachable attitude so students seek assistance when needed

Formative & Summative Evaluation
- Formative and summative evaluation should be used in clinical evaluation
- Formative evaluation should be given throughout the course
  - Gives students a chance to make improvements in performance before the end of the course
- Summative evaluation is given at end of course when course grade is assigned
  - Pass/Fail
  - A, B, C, F

Formative Evaluation
- Formative evaluation should be given informally and formally … frequently and privately
- Evaluations must be backed up with factual, anecdotal data — no interpretations should be made or opinions offered in anecdotal notes
- Ensure students understand grading schema and how grading continuum is defined
  - Satisfactory/Unsatisfactory/Needs Improvement
  - Pass/Fail
  - Letter Grade
- Grades are not usually assigned during formative evaluation
- Performance level in relation to expectations can be determined — satisfactory, unsatisfactory
  - Daily/Weekly evaluations (verbal and written)
  - Written assignments
  - Midterm evaluation — ALWAYS DO ONE
- Midterm performance that is unsatisfactory or reveals deficiency should be addressed with a midterm contract

**Midterm Contract**
- When in doubt, give it out
- Informs student of unsatisfactory performance and potential for failure/implications
- Must include specific list of criteria that has to be met to pass and within what time frame
- Student must be given opportunity to read anecdotal notes and sign that they were read
- Improvement plan must be included
- Weekly follow-up should be provided

**Summative Evaluation**
- Summative evaluation should be given at end of course
- Use of clinical rubric will enhance objectivity
- Seek validation of student performance with another educator
- Discuss concerns with course/level coordinator
- Conduct a formal final evaluation and have course/level coordinator present when appropriate
- Inform student of right to due process with an appeal

**Due Process**
- Students have the right to due process if they feel their grade was not awarded in a fair manner
  - Faculty decisions are not arbitrary, capricious or discriminatory
  - Student is entitled to a hearing
  - Decision made in hearing should be fair, objective and non-discriminatory

**Due Process — Student Role**
- Appeal/grievance policy should be readily available to students
- Guidelines for initiating appeal should be included along with a timeline
- Evidence is presented by student that grade was awarded in an arbitrary, capricious, or discriminatory manner
- Committee should be in place to review student appeals/grievances
  - Evidence presented by student *inadequate* to challenge grade assigned
  - Evidence presented by student *supports* the need for re-evaluation of grade by course faculty
Due Process — Faculty Role
- Validate that grade assigned was fair and in concert with criteria outlined in syllabus
- Ensure adequate anecdotal data and have been collected to support final course grade
- Ensure student was given opportunity to demonstrate improvement in performance
- Grade earned should be given even if appeal seems inevitable

Student Appeal Process — Outcome
- If student’s appeal is not upheld and wishes to continue process, further guidelines should be followed
  - Review by Academic Dean/Director
  - Legal Counsel
    - Courts have consistently supported faculty decision regarding student evaluation as long as due process was followed

FERPA
- Family Education Rights and Privacy Act of 1974 protects the following rights of students
  - The right to access educational records kept by the school
  - The right to disclose/release educational records only with student consent
  - The right to amend educational records
  - The right to file complaints against the school for disclosing educational records in violation of FERPA

Clinical Evaluation Process Overview
- Understand clinical objectives/student expectations
- Comfortable with evaluation tools/methods
- Select appropriate clinical site and experiences
- Observe students and collect data
- Provide judicious amount of feedback
- Keep private and secure anecdotal notes
- Evaluate performance in relation to objectives
- Give student time to correct deficiencies
- Arrive at a final grade that is fair and supported with data

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