

ITA: A Training Aid, Not a Bureaucratic Chore!

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While there are many reasons for undertaking “In Training Assessment” (ITA), it is the way these assessments can enhance learning and improve performance that is the focus of this talk. ITA is not just a form but a process or a “sub-curriculum”, the components being:

- syllabus (outline of expectations)
- assessment methods
- assessment outcomes

A workplace performance syllabus needs to cover knowledge, skills and attributes. It should reflect the specialty’s and the community’s aspirations for the performance of a specialist anaesthetist. The CanMEDS framework has the required broad based foundation and has been adopted as the framework for the ITA syllabus within the overall ANZCA curriculum review. Extensive consultation has occurred to ensure the syllabus also meets local needs. Incorporating descriptors and having a discussion of the syllabus at the initial interview helps supervisors and trainees develop a shared understanding of expectations.

The principles of good education practice dictate that the assessment methods used should be appropriate for the task, that there should be adequate sampling across the spectrum of the syllabus and clinical material, and that bias is addressed. Achieving this in the workplace means using a number of different assessment methods (some are more appropriate for certain aspects of the syllabus than others), using many assessors, and doing multiple, predominantly real time assessments. These different methods are the Workplace Based Assessment (WBA) tools that provide information which constitutes a “portfolio of evidence” for filling out the ITA form.

Assessments motivate trainees to focus on the requirements of the syllabus, hence the importance of getting the syllabus right. They assist supervisors to tailor training to the specific level and needs of the individual through feedback, specific teaching or a remediation program if required. This is more effective than a “one size fits all” approach. The WBAs incorporate feedback, are multiple and on-going throughout the term and are therefore part of a continuous cycle of performance improvement. The end of term interview is a time to review all the information from the assessments in order to make a logical plan for the future.

The ITA process can provide structured assistance to both trainees and supervisors to enhance the training experience. The positive effect on training will depend on the promotion of the syllabus, the accuracy of the assessments and what is done with the information gained. Other important functions of the ITA, such as ensuring competence, are also best achieved by optimising the same components described above.

