

Evaluation 101

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Providing an evaluation of the student's performance while they were with us in the office is the required part of teaching that some of us may find difficult to do. We will address standards, which are the framework upon which we develop our evaluations.

A standard is defined as "the degree or level of requirement, excellence or attainment; of acceptable quality." A standard is not a goal. Our goal may be that our students are the best in the galaxy, but established standards are designed to ensure that they meet a reasonable endpoint (e.g., they are capable of providing competent and quality primary care to patients). You and the students should receive from the medical school a copy of these standards for their rotation with you. These standards should be written and reviewed with the students. It is these standards by which you will formulate your evaluations of the students (i.e., did they meet the standards?). Ask the medical school for these standards if you have not received them.

If the medical school does not have formal written standards for their clinical rotation, you may need to develop these standards yourself and then share them with the student at the beginning of the rotation. Each student should know how they will be evaluated, and the standards by which they will be judged. The three types of standards upon which you may want to base your evaluation include:

1. **Performance Standards** - fundamental knowledge, ability to perform a history and physical, technical skills, humanistic/interpersonal skills, clinical judgment, and ability to recognize limitations
2. **Standards of Conduct** - integrity, absence of substance abuse, appropriate relationships with patients, responsibility, attendance and timeliness.
3. **Standards for the Rotation** - required readings, call (if any), ability to see patients efficiently in your office and patient presentation skills.

If you are asked to provide an evaluation for your students, it is also important to know "the terminators" — those violations that may lead to termination. These terminators are most often standards of conduct, and may include lying, falsifying records, inappropriate interpersonal relationships with patients, etc. Ask the medical student coordinator about these potential terminators.

The purpose for knowing the standards and terminators is that you, as a preceptor, are responsible for evaluating the performance of the students while they are under your supervision. The purpose of evaluation is "to examine and judge; to appraise." Evaluation is distinct from feedback, which is meant to improve future performance. Evaluation is a judgment of performance and assesses whether established standards were met.

This aspect of teaching is a duty not to be taken lightly. We have an obligation to society and to our peers to perform an accurate evaluation. When we evaluate our students, we

are stating to society that they did or did not meet the established standards for the rotation, and that they are or are not receiving our "stamp of approval." When we give students a "passing grade," we are stating that they met the standards of the rotation, and that they possess the qualities and skills needed to become competent physicians. If we have concerns about a student's performance, it is best to address those concerns now, rather than allow him/her to pass on through and eventually graduate although potentially serious flaws were noted.

Fortunately, most students possess the potential to be outstanding clinicians. They have already gone through several filters before arriving in your office. However, it is still your responsibility to remain ever vigilant to ensure that all students that pass your rotation meet those established standards. Our obligation is to spot those few students who potentially may be a danger to our patients and to society, and to provide an accurate evaluation that addresses our concerns.