Directly observed procedural skills – what do the assessors think?

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Background
Directly observed procedural skills (DOPS) assessments are widely used in clinical education for the assessment of competency in real-life situations. DOPS assessments have been used at Glasgow for the last 5 years, as the principle formal method of assessing students’ practical skills in final year. Importantly, in these assessments, encounters are not simulated and the assessment of practical skills occurs during normal clinical duties using real animals. The level which candidates have to achieve to pass a DOPS assessment is based on an expert consensus opinion (between assessors) of what constitutes clinical competence for a new graduate.

Aims
The aims of this study were to i) gather more information about staff performance in DOPS assessment, ii) reinforce best practice and iii) survey assessors’ perceptions of DOPS to assess the validity of these assessments.

Methods
Each assessor (participant) was reviewed by a peer (or by self-reflection) once during the study period (3 months). Core rotation leaders were observed by other rotation leaders to reinforce expected best practice. Participants completed a short written survey commenting on assessors’ performance as well as a section to rate and comment on the perceived validity of the DOPS as a form of assessment.

Assessor opinions
44 assessors participated in the study. Figure 1 shows responses to survey questions regarding the reliability, validity and education impact of DOPS assessment.

90% of assessors would recommend DOPS assessments to another veterinary school

Conclusions
In conclusion, at least when peer observation is undertaken, feedback provision appears to be good. Full written feedback appears to be provided less often than oral feedback. In addition, based on the survey, 88% of assessors either agreed or strongly agreed that they found it easy to give feedback.

Overall, 90% of assessors would recommend DOPS assessments to another veterinary school which is clearly encouraging evidence supporting the educational value of DOPS.