

Entrustable Professional Activities and Oral Implant Care

Trust is a key component of patient safety. While the truth of this statement appears obvious, the nuances are complicated. Trust is derived from communicating an empathetic understanding of a patient's needs, interests, and desires within a framework of a clinician's knowledge and skills. In higher education, we utilize the concept of the novice provider moving from being a beginner to competently performing defined "entrustable professional activities" (EPAs), or what the American Council for Graduate Medical Education (ACGME)* calls "milestones." Ten Cate¹ described five stages of supervision, where observation by an expert is used to guide the learner through developing thought processes, with progressively less supervision as trust is recognized. The stages were described as: "(1) Observation but no execution, even with direct supervision; (2) execution with direct, proactive supervision; (3) execution with reactive supervision, ie, on request and quickly available; (4) supervision at a distance and/or post hoc, and (5) supervision provided by the trainee to more junior colleagues." A key concept here is the move to entrustment of unsupervised clinical activities. These EPAs are now used to measure a range of defined knowledge, skills, and attitude measures (KSAs) of demonstrated activities in clinical medical education, expanding on the older concept of competencies. Note that this is an intentional move away from clinical procedural "requirements," which provides marginal information on learning. In North America, there is an intensive discussion in dental education to move in this direction.

Now I would like to draw the reader's attention to the third letter of KSAs: attitude. To me, attitude is another way of defining the empathetic relationship between two people; the example here is the relationship between provider and their patient. For a clinical learner, these KSAs consist of various measurable characteristics demonstrating a patient-centric attitude. KSAs are great for education, but are there elements to inform us of clinical team dynamics in our practices? I think there are.

As I think about EPAs, I consider how trust is gradually built within a practice, which is reflected in the practice's culture. Patients build trust in the provider through the attitudes they observe in team members and how they (feel they) are communicated with. This applies to the level of information they want and need for consent, well-supported experiences, and a perceived focus on excellence in the practice. In turn, the provider measures and relies on the trust of the

activities in one's office, the manufacturers of implants and biologic materials, the supportive clinicians, and the dental laboratory. Each of these examples are relationships, and though each one has a different level of necessary knowledge and skill, all of them need a patient-centered focus. However, there are times when the relationships become difficult. This can occur by questioning knowledge and skills, a change in attitude within the relationship, or simply poor communication. An old saying often attributed to William James, an American philosopher, says: "Whenever two people meet, there are really six people present."² To summarize, there is each person as they see themselves, as the other perceives them, and as they really are. All of these facets have the potential for misunderstanding.

Thus, when I listen to a presentation on a new product, review the research supporting its efficacy, and decide to use or not, there are implicit assumptions or attitudes of trust—but I listen to the intent of the speaker. When I work with my dental laboratories, communication about the expected color, shape, contours, and occlusion are critical. Yes, there are digital tools to help communication, but clinical knowledge and skills are still needed—so I listen to the intent of my technician. When I work with my orthodontic, oral and maxillofacial surgery or other clinical colleagues, there is once again a presumption of clinical knowledge and skill—but I listen to their projected attitude. In any situation, I always come back to attitude, which is in some ways the most critical aspect of EPAs. An attitude of global empathetic communication is key to a culture of patient safety, yet it is so hard to teach. If it's hard to teach, it may be more difficult in practice. It can be observed, it can be measured, and we can, at least in the university, hold students accountable—to a degree. By holding students accountable to the clinical KSAs necessary for patient safety, we intentionally strive to build onto a long-term culture of KSAs that will continue into real-world practice. The challenge is measurement and accountability. Is the provider delivering contemporary care with the best outcomes possible? Are they applying evidence in decision-making? Are they holding their referrals and suppliers accountable, as we are held accountable to our patients?

The future is bright in implant tooth replacement therapy. The application of digital technologies, cloud-based machine learning, and application of web- and evidence-based best practices (aka, clinical decision support systems) all provide new means to hold us accountable. It also means each member of the clinical

care team must hold each other accountable—and thus, we return to entrustment. Entrustment is a reputational culture that is hard to earn and easy to lose. This is why medical and dental education has moved to inculcate accountability beyond the old approaches of counting procedures to one of observed, progressive, and measurable improvements. My hope is that we can maintain this culture over one's professional lifespan. Time will tell.

Regards



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REFERENCES

1. Ten Cate O. Nuts and bolts of entrustable professional activities. *J Grad Medical Educ* 2013;5:157–158.
2. <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/james/>

*ACGME (American Council for Graduate Medical Education) is the accrediting agency for medical residency education in North America and many other countries around the world.