**BAOMS Research Grant**

Arpan Tahim

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**Project title:**

How surgeons-in-training learn through the use of workplace-based assessment

**Supervisors**:

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**Institute**:

UCL Institute of Education

I was delighted to be awarded this research grant and would like to thank BAOMS for supporting this research project. Workplace-based assessment (WBA) is used in a formative capacity by surgeons-in-training throughout their postgraduate surgical education. An assessor usually observes an episode of patient care carried out by the learner as part of their practice. A pre-structured proforma acts as a template to facilitate learner: assessor dialogue, allowing for assessment of all aspects of performance and for feedback. Current research focuses on outcomes of WBAs (how well a learner performs) and user perception (how participants feel about WBAs). However, there is limited understanding of what actually happens during WBAs and therefore no empirical basis for explaining outcomes, users’ perceptions or predicting the learning potential of these activities. This study explores what WBAs look like in situ, what surgeons-in-training identify as having learnt from them and how they respond to it in their future practice.

The overarching research question concerned *“How surgeons-in-training learn through the use of WBA?”* In order to investigate this, three secondary questions were addressed:

1) How are WBA’s currently conducted by surgeons-in-training? What does a WBA look like in situ?

2) What does a surgeon-in-training identify as having learnt from an individual WBA and how does this relate to the event itself?

3) How does a surgeon-in-training respond to and make use of the WBA in their future practice?

Over the study period, data has been generated through audiovisual recording and non-participant observation of real-time clinical supervisor-trainee interactions that lead to the completion of workplace-based assessments. The documents that trainees created were analysed and further insights were gathered through sequential interviews with the learners themselves. Data was analysed to re-construct the ‘natural history’ of these exercises - how these clinical exercises took place in the surgical workplace - how they were planned, carried out and subsequently described and recorded by learners.

Initial ethnographically informed insights mapped out how WBA events were constructed – how clinical events, as experienced by learners, panned out and were subsequently presented in standardised documents. After in-depth, highly detailed transcription of audiovisual data, early multimodal data analysis then focused on examining the pedagogic aspects of the clinical interactions that underpin these WBA exercises - how learners and supervisors communicated through various modes, and how learners generated meaning from these exchanges. We next examined the relationship between these lived learning experiences and their translation into written documents, looking specifically at the WBA form as a separate meaning making entity. Analysis highlighted the congruence/ incongruence between the experience, the document and the different modal affordances offered through each. Preliminary findings showed that learners were more likely to record aspects of their experiences that they found easier, more relevant and of greater importance. Similarly, there were elements of the interactions that learners found difficult to remember/write about or felt were of limited value, which led to their active/passive omission. Further research is currently ongoing, as we look to investigate this relationship further, framing the analysis using the concepts of performance (as informed by the work of Erving Goffman) and reflection within profession practice (as detailed in Donald Schon’s research).

This research will help OMFS (and other) trainees to better understand the purpose and process of assessment in the workplace, thus improving their own reflective education. Furthermore, fuller understanding of these complex learning episodes will inform policy-makers, specialty training programmes and opinion leaders, allowing an improved utilisation and integration of workplace assessment in curricula and thus improving surgical education in the future. More broadly, surgical education represents an important ‘*telling case*’ to explore workplace learning in greater detail and the insights gained here can be used to improve education practice and shed light on the potential of WBAs in the wider workplace.

This BAOMS grant has funded key research expenses covering transcription, printing, running, travel and research dissemination costs. Preliminary findings were presented at the Association for Medical Education in Europe annual conference in Vienna. Further results have been accepted for oral presentation at the Med Transform conference (Imperial College London, 2020). A manuscript will be prepared for submission to BJOMS as per the research grant agreement

Once again, I would like to thank BAOMS for their support in this research study.