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Western Journal of Emergency Medicine: Integrating Emergency Care with Population Health

Title

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Permalink

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Journal

Western Journal of Emergency Medicine: Integrating Emergency Care with Population Health, 15(5.1)

ISSN

1936-900X

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Publication Date

2014

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3 Council of Emergency Medicine Residency Directors Standardized Letter of Evaluation: Program Director's Perspective

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Objectives: The Standardized Letter of Evaluation (SLOE) was created in 1997 to provide Program Directors (PDs) with a summative evaluation that incorporates normative grading. Though the SLOE has become increasingly popular and important in decision making, it has not been studied in the past 12 years. In order to assess the SLOEs effectiveness and limitations, the perspective of EM PDs was surveyed.

Methods: After validation of the survey by 10 retired PDs, a questionnaire was sent to each PD of the 159 EM residencies that existed at that time. The survey was circulated via the CORD listserv from January 24th, 2013 to February 13th, 2013.

Results: One hundred and fifty of 159 PDs (94.3%) completed the questionnaire. Nearly all respondents (99.3%: 149/150) agreed that the SLOE is an important evaluative tool and should continue to be used. In the application process, 60.7% (91/150) of programs require 1 or more SLOEs and an additional 36.7% (55/150) recommend but do not require a SLOE to be considered for interview. When asked to identify the top three factors when deciding who should be interviewed, the SLOE was ranked first (92.7%: 139/150) with EM rotation grades ranked second (48.7%: 73/150). The three most common factors identified that diminished the value of the SLOE in order of the number of responses were (1) Inflated evaluations (88.4%: 129/146), (2) Inconsistency between comments and grades (79.5%: 116/146), (3) Inadequate perspective on candidate attributes in the written comments (52.7%: 77/146) and inexperienced letter writers (52.7%: 77/146).

Conclusions: The SLOE is the most important tool in the EM PDs armamentarium for determining which candidates should be interviewed for residency training. The SLOEs potential utility is hampered by a number of factors, most important of which is inflated evaluations. Focused changes in the SLOE template should be mindful that it appears, in general, to be successful in its intended purpose.