

TITLE:

Does the students' attitudes towards communication change through the 4-year program with a structured communication skills curriculum?

AUTHORS: - with affiliation(s)

Munashe Chigerwe – UC Davis
Jim Clark – UC Davis
Jody Yelland – Davis
Karen Boudreaux – UC Davis

ABSTRACT: 300 word limit (when applicable, please include: purpose & background, methods, results, conclusions/discussion)

Purpose and background: Communication skills is considered an essential non-cognitive skill for veterinary graduates. However, there is an assumption that students have positive and negative attitudes towards learning communication skills. There is also a perception of a disconnect between communication skills learned by students in the preclinical years and the opportunities to practice communication skills provided for the students in the clinical year. Furthermore, there is no instrument that has been validated for use in veterinary medical students to assess communication skills. The purpose of this study was to validate a communication skills attitude scale (CSAS) to assess students' attitudes towards learning communication skills and assess the changes in their attitudes throughout a 4-year veterinary program with a structured communication skills curriculum.

Methods: Longitudinal study. The CSAS was administered to veterinary students at beginning of the first year and throughout the 2nd, 3rd and 4th (clinical) years. The CSAS was validated using factor analysis. Students' change in attitude over the 4 years were analyzed.

Results: A modified CSAS developed in this study was deemed appropriate for use in veterinary medical students. Students' attitudes were not simply categorized as negative or positive but fell into 3 subscales namely learning, respect and importance. Results on the changes in the students' attitude over the years are pending but will be available by first week of June 2019.

Conclusions: Methods to improve the students' attitude towards communication need to be comprehensive, including providing opportunities in the clinical years and communication between preclinical and clinical faculty.