Assessing the hospital communication skills of migrant health professionals in Europe

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*telc – language tests*

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telc's German health professional examinations

For doctors:
Dual-level CEFR B2-C1

For nurses:
Dual-level CEFR B1-B2
Overview of today's talk

A. Introduction: the need

• International recruitment of health professionals is here to stay.
• The situation regarding recognition for migrants to Germany and the UK.

B. Main Body: telc's solution
exams for migrant health professionals in Germany

• Format of the dual-level exams for doctors and nurses
• The type of communicative language tested
• CEFR descriptors adapted to the hospital situation

C. Conclusion: using the solution

• Only mandatory, valid and reliable language testing of internationally recruited healthcare professionals will safeguard essential workplace communication.
A: Why is there a need for language tests for health care professionals?

1. Acute shortages of doctors and nurses in countries such as UK and Germany → high numbers of migrant health professionals being recruited internationally.

2. Mutual foreign credential recognition within the EU, but only for the professional qualifications.

3. In UK mandatory language proficiency requirement only for third country migrants, not for EU nationals.

4. In Germany no standardised language testing requirement for migrant health professionals. Requirements differ between regions.

5. Issues regarding health professionals' language skills and reliance on generic, not health-specific language tests.
What kind of examination is required?

**Generic, all-purpose test**

1. Tests ability in a generic, one-size-fits-all context
2. Tasks must be appropriate for a large range of candidates (ages, backgrounds, interests, motivation)
3. Tasks must be neutral and are restricted to everyday or common scenarios

**Profession-specific test**

1. Tests ability in a specific context: authenticity, validity
2. Tasks can be aimed directly at the target group (age range, knowledge, education, experience, motivation)
3. Tasks can replicate the types of interactions typical for the domain, use occupational language etc.
B: telc's answer was introduced in 2013

For nursing staff: *telc Deutsch B1·B2 Pflege*

- **Relevance:** High-stakes exam
- **Target group:** nurses or carers needing licence to practice in a hospital or care home
- **Aim:** test of language used at workplace
- **Skills tested:** two receptive, two productive
- **Level:** dual-level B1-B2
- **Format:** pen and paper, Written test, Speaking test
- **Extra materials:** phrase box, mock exam, examination preparation materials
For hospital doctors: telc Deutsch B2·C1Medizin

- **Relevance**: High-stakes exam
- **Target group**: hospital doctors needing licence to practice medicine
- **Aim**: test of language used at workplace
- **Skills tested**: two receptive, two productive
- **Level**: dual-level B2-C1
- **Format**: pen and paper, Written test, Speaking test
- **Extra materials**: phrase box, mock exam, examination preparation materials
A test is not enough…

The test experience encompasses:

Curriculum, group instruction, private study, phrase cards, mock exams, tips for test-takers, taking the test…

Examiner training, teaching materials, on-site training, seminars for stakeholders…
Benefits of the test experience

For Stakeholders

1. They know the test is fit for purpose (valid)
2. They can understand the rationale of the test
3. Test aids recruitment or is prerequisite for employment
4. Test useable for on-site training of medical communication skills

For Candidates (IHP)

1. Gateway to employment (recognition)
2. Enables IHPs to acquire more confidence in their professional manner
3. Gain in patient safety
4. Ability of IHPs to communicate with patients, co-workers etc. with empathy and tact
How easy is communication in a medical setting?

Even the uninformed general public is aware of the complexities of doctor-patient communication. See the humourous reference to Doctorspeak on a get-well greetings card:
The Interpreter's Guide to Doctorspeak

What Your Doctor Says:  What Your Doctor Means:
I'd like to run a few more tests.  I have absolutely no idea what's wrong with you.
Bend over.

Please make a follow-up appointment.

Bend over.

( Hey, some things are bad enough without some deeper meaning. )

Don't bother me now - I'm busy.
The medical profession relies heavily on oral and written communication

What language must be taught, what language must be tested?

1. Medical jargon
2. Professional language
3. General language

1. Specialised jargon, terminology restricted to experts (not just vocabulary, also conventions)
2. Occupational language, job-related, used within a larger group
3. Everyday language (as learnt in school or family)
What activity is being described here?

Answering the call of nature
Washing my hands
Going where even the king goes alone
Paying a visit
Going to see a man about a dog
Going to the bathroom
Heightening cultural sensitivity

I want to spend a penny, not go to the shop: nurses to be taught euphemisms

Norfolk hospital organises lessons for foreign nurses to avoid cultural misunderstandings with patients

Source: Headline of an article by Caroline Davis in the Guardian newspaper on Tues., 31 August 2010
Doctors and nurses need to use different varieties of speech at the workplace

Well now, how is Mrs Smith today?

She has had problems with micturition, so I would suggest doing a MCU.

Please let me know if you have any discomfort.

OR Does it hurt?
Scenarios in the oral examination

- Conversation between colleagues (e.g. hand-over meeting)
- Conversation with patients (e.g. history-taking)
- Conversation with patients' relatives or carers (e.g. explanation of treatment to be carried out)
Scenarios in the written examination

Fact sheet about a patient,
discharge note,
informal email to colleagues,
chronological patient history
Relevant CEFR Descriptors - Listening

Overall Listening Comprehension  C1 (Physician)

Can understand enough to follow extended speech on abstract and complex topics beyond his/her own field, though he/she may need to confirm occasional details, especially if the accent is unfamiliar (lecture on new aspects of treatment). Can follow extended speech even when it is not clearly structured (anxious or confused new patient during history-taking).
Reading Instructions  B2 (Physician, Nurse)

Can understand lengthy, complex instructions in his/her field, including details on conditions and warnings, provided he/she can reread difficult sections (instructions about hygiene precautions or security measures),
Writing Reports and Essays  C1 (Physician)

Can write clear, well-structured expositions of complex subjects, underlining the relevant salient issues. Can expand and support points of view at some length with subsidiary points, reasons and relevant examples (referral or discharge letters, reports to insurance companies).
Relevant CEFR Descriptors - Speaking

Overall Spoken Interaction  B1 (Nurse)

Can communicate with some confidence on familiar routine and non-routine matters related to his/her interests and professional field (explaining to a new colleague how to work a machine, giving simple instructions to a patient during a medical examination).
The advantages of tailor-made language examinations for health care personnel

1. The language competence of migrant health professions can be reliably assessed and certified using alignment to the CEFR and suitably adapted descriptors.

2. Tests and teaching materials which concentrate on workplace scenarios are effective preparation for employment.

3. The tests help students to acquire appropriate communication skills which they need in challenging health care environments.
C: Conclusions

1. Only mandatory, valid and reliable language testing of internationally recruited healthcare professionals will safeguard essential workplace communication.

2. A test such as telc's examinations for doctors and nurses can be an important part of the host country's culture of welcome.
Sources

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4. Identifying the appropriate IELTS score levels for IMG applicants to the GMC register Berry, O’Sullivan, Rugea, Roehampton, 2013
5. Der lange Weg für ausländische Ärzte in Deutschland, Angela Mißlback Berliner Ärzte 08/2014 http://m.aebberlin.de/pdf/b1408.pdf
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Thank you for your interest