

Multiple Choice Questions (How valid as a tool of assessment)

Around sixties of the 20th century, the medical world outside America got a taste of American born MCQs system examination, consisting of four choices and a single best response. This was the time when Americans opened their doors for non American doctors provided they passed the ECFMG exams which consisted of MCQ's only.

If my memory serves well, in India the system of MCQs was adopted in late sixties. There is no denying that in contrast to the conventional essay type questions, the MCQs assesses knowledge of the students more comprehensively because questions cover much wider part of syllabi. Secondly, the evaluation became more objective. Students got full one mark for right answer and zero if he wronged it.

However, no system is perfect for the perpetuity. People including ECFMG board soon started finding faults with MCQs. There are two fundamental prerequisites of any question. It should be unambiguous and should be of the standard for which it has been developed. The ECFMG board soon found both these faults in the questions and hence changed the system. The highest marks scored in 150 centers of ECFMG was considered 100% and a student had to get 75% out of this 100% (SYSTEM OF SCALED SCORING).

Unfortunately, we have continued with the same copycat version of MCQs without any change. Probably thinking its infallibility because of its western origin, a typical post hoc fallacy. With MCQs in great vogue, it is shocking to notice wrongly set questions even in important examinations.

It is therefore time we started standardizing our MCQs either by heavily moderating it or by creating standard question banks. Failing this we shall continue to witness wrong MCQ questions poorly copied from MCQs books which are flooding the market.

Prof. S. M. Mishra
MS(Surgery), MS(Ortho), FRCS
Editor In Chief