



THE UNIVERSITY OF  
MELBOURNE

Department of  
Medical Education  
Melbourne Medical School

# PhD completion seminar

## Assessor grades and feedback: Private thoughts and public judgements

### Abstract

The assessment of medical trainees' performance in the workplace is now widespread and aims to provide trainees with accurate and meaningful information and guidance on their learning and developing competence. However, in practice, such goals aren't always achieved. Sometimes assessors find it difficult to deliver clear and consistent assessment messages to a trainee, especially when the feedback or judgement they have to give is negative. The MUM effect – the widespread human tendency to keep Mum about Undesirable Messages – may have relevance for this situation.

This presentation discusses how and why reluctance to deliver negative assessment messages manifests in dermatology training in Australia, through a mixed methods study. Background literature on the issue will be discussed and the results of studies exploring both assessor and supervisor opinion and experience presented.

The findings show that failure to fail and grade inflation are real issues in medical education and the MUM effect can offer one explanation for their persistence, despite the methods employed to date to address them. Assessors face many pressures and dilemmas in their role and trainees are aware that sometimes the judgement delivered differs from the assessor's private thoughts on their performance. Addressing perceptions about 'failure' and increasing supports for assessors may be keys to improving the situation.

### Biography

Cate Scarff is a fellow of the Australasian College of Dermatologists with special interests in confocal microscopy and hyperhidrosis. She commenced study in medical education in 2011 at Monash University, where she completed a Master of Health Professional Education. Her research interests are the assessment of medical trainees in the clinical setting and the challenges this may present.



**Dr Catherine E Scarff**

Friday 13 September 2019  
1.30-3.00pm

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