

Core Skills for the CASC

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Clinical Assessment of Skills and Competencies (CASC) was implemented in 2008 as the final membership examination of the Royal College of Psychiatrists in the United Kingdom. Candidates are required to demonstrate their clinical skills in a variety of controlled clinical scenarios. Although what is tested is simply what should be carried out in day-to-day clinical practice, people are often nervous about the examination and try to seek resources that can guide them through the examination smoothly. The anxiety is, to a certain extent, understandable because people may have focused on book knowledge in their training without fully addressing the equal importance of use of voice, body language, and questioning technique and structure in communicating with patients. All these are important parameters in the examination.

The book "Core Skills for the CASC" is a useful resource for people who plan to sit the examination. The authors comprise a consultant psychiatrist and a higher specialist trainee, and so perspectives from both stages of the career are taken into account. They also developed the "Core Adaptive Skills for CASC" course that is currently run at the College.

The book is well-organised into 3 parts. The first part focuses on communication skills, time management, taking control and using a more structured approach. Candidates often find it difficult and stressful to demonstrate their skills and knowledge in a relatively short time allowed for each station (7-10 minutes) and under the close scrutiny of examiners. This part of the book addresses this concern and offers useful advice on how this area can be tackled. There are also scope and practical tips on physical examination, investigations, and cognitive assessment.

Part 2 of the book guides people on how to prepare for the examination, both on an individual basis and a group basis. The authors advise about the psychological preparation needed and how to cope with anxiety. The advice is very practical and useful both for the examination as well as for our daily life. Descriptions of the examination day can let novice candidates have a realistic appraisal of the situation and thus any anticipatory anxiety can be much lowered. The importance of group preparation is not underestimated either. The authors provide very useful tips on this to enhance mutual coaching and learning.

In the final part of the book, there are 4 mock stations in which people can try to apply the skills and techniques outlined above. Through practice on these stations, an individual can become aware of their own strengths and deficits and highlight areas where further preparation is required. Nevertheless, the authors correctly point out that people should not, and it is impossible to, try to memorise scripts of all possible scenarios that, on the contrary, can offer a false sense of security.

The contents of the book are comprehensive, practical, concise, and easy to read. The book consists of just 80 pages so it should not take long to grasp the essence of the examination.

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