

What is the evidence behind Entrustable Professional Activities?



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Background

Entrustable Professional Activities (EPAs) have been widely adopted internationally in postgraduate medical education as a means of operationalising or authenticating competencies by embedding them in key professional tasks in the workplace. This trend is now continuing to Undergraduate Medical Education (UME).

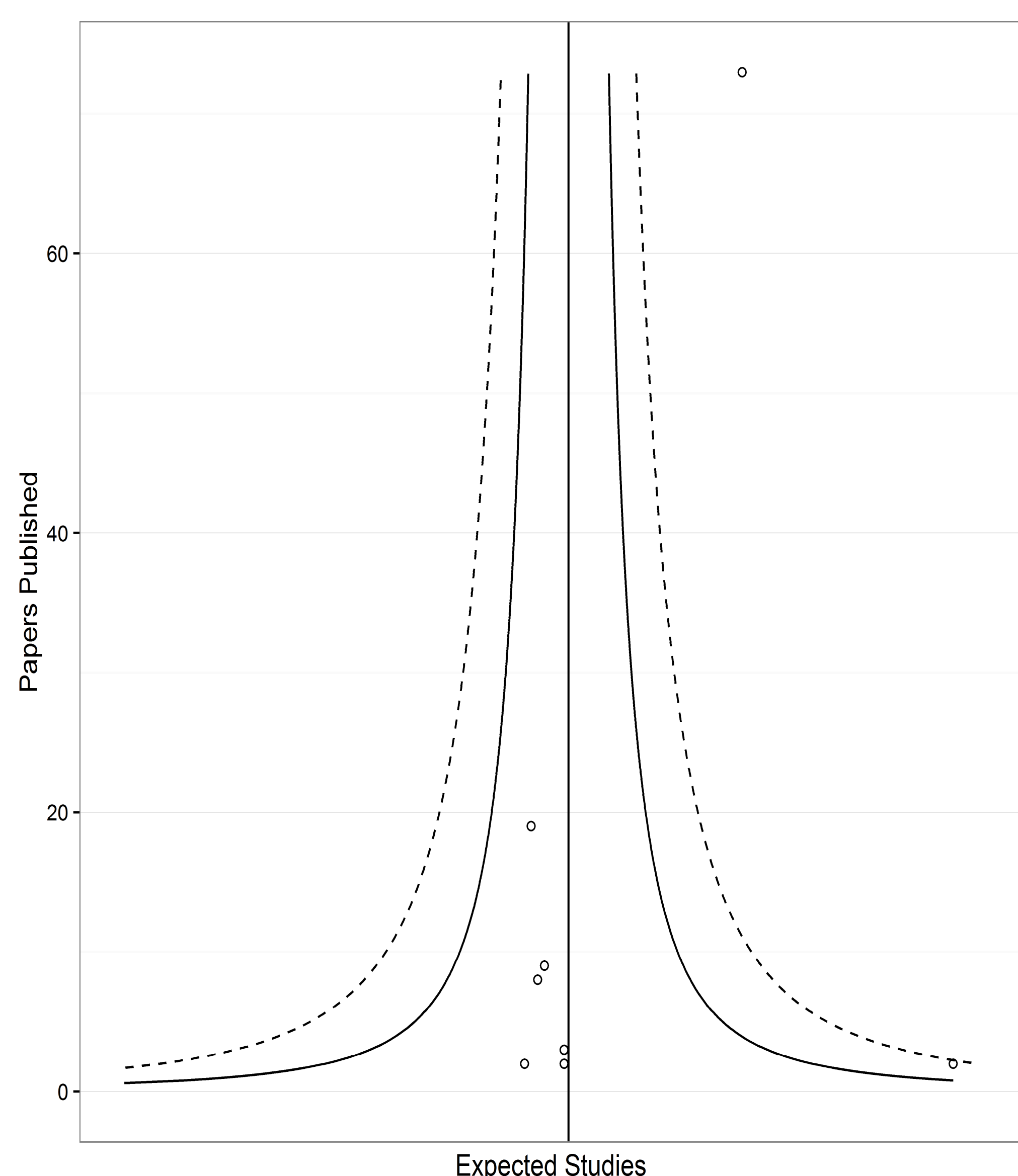
The aim of this study was to thoroughly review the existing literature on EPAs to evaluate whether they have a positive educational impact, are acceptable to stakeholders, and are cost-effective.

Methods

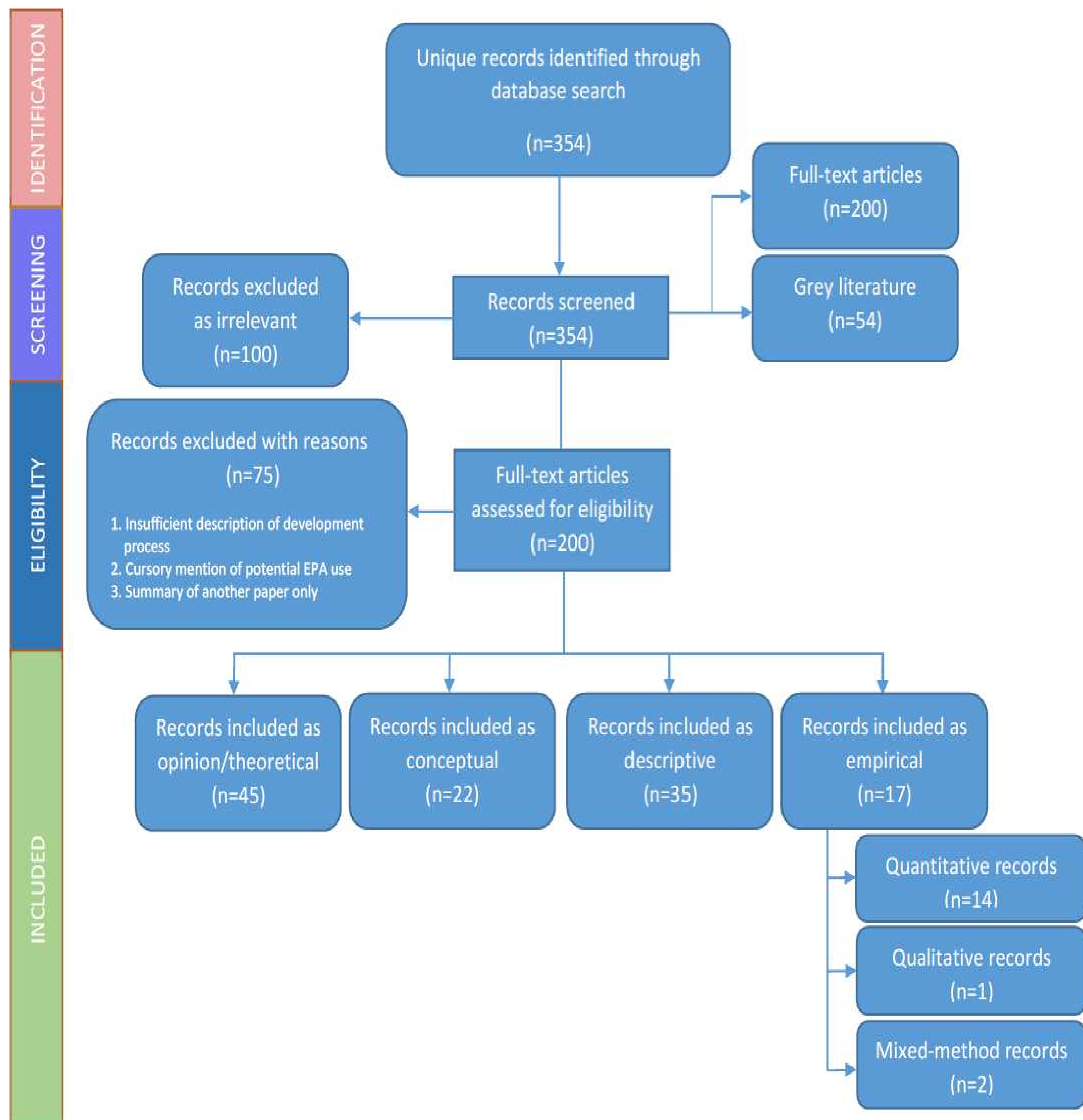
- A systematic literature search using appropriate keywords was carried out for a 10-year period from 2005 (when EPAs were first described)
- Databases searched: Embase, ERIC, Medline, Google Scholar (grey literature), PsycINFO, PubMed and Web of Science
- 200 full-text articles were identified for screening
- Two independent reviewers extracted data from the identified articles for analysis
- 125 of these met the criteria for inclusion in a scoping review

Results

- Much of the published literature on EPAs focuses on theory, opinion and concept
- Descriptive articles reveal considerable variability in methods employed in EPA development (e.g. starting point, who is involved in the process, who is considered an expert)
- There is often confusion around the difference between EPAs and competencies
- There are few evaluations of EPA implementation
- More than half of the included studies were published in the USA



Funnel plot illustrating place of publication bias



Conclusions

- There is currently a lack of empirical evidence to support the widespread introduction of EPAs.
- There is no conclusive evidence to date that EPAs have any educational impact beyond user satisfaction.
- The medical education community should commit to publishing evaluations of their EPA programmes to address the gaps in the literature and ensure we continue to adopt best practice in our assessment methods.
- The literature is currently being published heavily in concentrated geographical areas by a small number of authors and institutions meaning there could be unknown context effects. More research from underrepresented institutions would be welcome.

References

- Klaman DL, Williams FG, Cianciolo AT. Competencies, milestones and EPAs – Are those who ignore the past condemned to repeat it? *Med Teach* 2016; Jan 25: 1-7 [epub]
- ten Cate O. Entrustability of professional activities and competency-based training. *Med Educ* 2005; 39(12): 1176–7

Additional Information

This work was funded by small grants from SMERC and The University of Edinburgh Principal's Teaching Award Scheme
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