

A Visual Analog Scale to Rate Physician – Patient Rapport
Millis SR, Jain SS, Eyles M, Tulsy D, Nadler SF, Foye PM, DeLisa JA.
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Objective: To determine the degree of association between a visual analog scale (VAS) and multiple-item rating scale designed to assess communication skills in resident physicians.

Design: Measurement evaluation.

Setting: Objective structured clinical examination.

Subjects: 25 PGY-2, PGY-3, and PGY-4 residents in physical medicine and rehabilitation, standardized patient (SP), and faculty rater.

Main Outcome Measures: 9-item rating scale and 100-mm vertical visual analog scale.

Procedure: Residents conducted a 10-minute interview of SP and were instructed to obtain a brief history. No physical examination was performed. Residents were told that their patient communication skills were being assessed. Faculty rater observed the patient-resident interview via video. SP and faculty observer rated the residents' communication skills using the same multiple-item rating scale and VAS. On the VAS, they were asked to draw a horizontal line across the vertical rating line that corresponded to their overall level of satisfaction with the physician.

Results: The VAS and 9-item scale were correlated at statistically significant levels when used by both the SP ($r = .91$, $p = .0005$) and faculty rater ($r = .90$, $p = .0005$). The VAS was also highly correlated with SP's willingness to return to see the physician ($r_b = .86$, $p = .0005$).

Conclusions: Although the skills involved with communicating with patients effectively are complex, the VAS, as a simple global rating measure, correlated highly with a longer, multiple-item rating scale. The VAS may be useful as a simple screening measure to assist the clinician in quickly identifying possible problems in the doctor-patient relationship. Patients who are unable to complete standard questionnaires also can use the VAS.