Author's response to reviews

Title: Identifying context factors explaining physician's low performance on communication assessment: an explorative study in general practice

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Author's response to reviews: see over
Reviewer's report:
There are only two discretionary revisions I would like to mention, which are:

1. Background, second paragraph, is still not clear to me. The authors mention that there are various explanations for low scores on communication skills, and mention 2 (or 3 actually). The authors do not elaborate on the first ones (transfer, and long term effects), but only discuss the last one “secondly,….” in this article. I would like to suggest something like: ‘the transfer of skills from institute to practice is hampered because generic skills are taught, while in reality, GPs need to adjust their approach constantly’.

   Re: We have made an elaboration on transfer in the Background section. After the first sentence on transfer, it now reads: ‘The setting of the training institute, using role play as the main teaching method, is too different from everyday clinical experiences in the setting of daily practice. There is evidence that communication training programmes, that are aligned to daily practice, have resulted in more and long term positive effects [17,18]. Secondly, a number of authors have pointed at the generic nature of recommendations on communication and instruments that are used to assess professionals’ performance. The transfer of skills may be compromised even more due to the teaching of generic skills, while, in reality, GPs need to adjust their approach constantly to the specific context. Thirdly, the assumption that communication skills are generic and can be assessed as such may be unjustified [19-22].’

2. Discussion, second paragraph, is difficult to comprehend, at least for me, because I am confused about goals and communication behaviour/skills. It also lacks fluency, because every sentence is about goals and their relation to communication somehow. Please clarify.

   Re: We changed the paragraph as follows: ‘We found context factors that may explain GP’s low scores on communication. These empirical findings find theoretical resonance by looking at communication as goal-oriented behaviour. In the conceptual model by Feldman-Stewart [25], the communication process is directed by the goals each of the participants have – within the specific context that they are acting in. Other authors also pointed to the relevance of each of the participants goals for the communication process in the consultation [26,39,40]. If goals are modulated by the specific context and communication is goal-oriented, then context factors should explicitly play a role in the assessment of GP communication performance.’

3. EDITOR’S COMMENTS:
The authors have answered most questions of the reviewer in detail and I felt the paper reads more fluently now. However, it is not clear why the authors do not cite the reviewers’ paper about the increase in consultation skills levels in Dutch

Re: We regret to have omitted this study, so we changed the first paragraph. The text now is: ‘There are indications, however, that the effects of such communication skills training for GP registrars are limited [7-10], although a recent study shows some improvement is possible [11].’

I would like to express my gratitude for the reviewer’s comments that have helped to improve my article and make it more to the point.

Kindest regards,

Geurt Essers