Author’s response to reviews

Title: Knowledge assessment of trainees and trainers in General Practice in a neighboring country. Making a case for international collaboration.

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Version: 3 Date: 26 July 2012

Author’s response to reviews: see over
Thursday, July 26, 2012

Dear Editor

Thanks to the reviewers we have updated the manuscript.

As a response to their comments, important alterations in the manuscript were made and clearly marked in yellow.

I will give a detailed answer to the reviewers’ comments here below.

Roy Remmen, corresponding author
Reviewer’s report ONE: HARRY AHMED

Reviewer’s report:

This study reports on the feasibility of using a Dutch general practice knowledge test to assess Flemish general practice trainees. It argues the case for a more integrated and collaborative approach to general practice trainee assessment between neighbouring countries and states that this would lead to better quality assessment that is more cost effective.

Major Compulsory Revisions

This paper reports an interesting and original study that is certainly worthwhile for those involved in GP education. However, there are a number of issues;

1. This paper was difficult read. The English was unclear at times and there are a number of errors throughout the paper. For example;

   Abstract; Methods; Line 3
   ‘Trainees performed the test and trainers in general practice’
   This line should probably read:
   ‘The test was taken by general practice trainees and trainers’

   Background; Paragraph 6; Line 4
   ‘This report describes a first exploratory study to investigate..’
   This line should read:
   ‘This report describes the first exploratory study...’

   Conclusion; line 1
   ‘This study shows the feasibility of using the Dutch knowledge multiple-choice test is feasible in a neighboring country.’
This line should probably read:

‘This study shows that it is feasible to use a Dutch multiple choice knowledge test in a neighbouring country’

There are many more examples throughout the paper. I would suggest the Authors review and proof read the whole paper again and try and make the language clearer and easier to understand.

Answer to the reviewer: These suggestions were all used. We performed a thorough update of the text and finally a check of syntax throughout the paper.

2. Background

The background would benefit from being clearer. It would be useful to provide the reader with more detail regarding existing evidence e.g., are there any reports on collaborative assessment in any other specialties in Europe? Is there any existing evidence that collaboration improves quality or efficiency? The authors state in Paragraph 3 of the background that there is some evidence that collaboration is feasible in an international setting but the reference is for a study that reports on the difference in assessment results according to course and curriculum design so I don’t quite follow this.

Answer to the reviewer. We have expanded this part. Also, in the discussion the body of evidence is more systematically explored.

3. Results

It would help the reader to interpret the findings of the study if some information was provided on the demographics of the responders from the Belgian universities, and if these were compared with the demographics of the Dutch
cohort that was used as the reference group.

Answer to the reviewer: We have added some demographics like gender and age. Especially age may explain some of the differences of the scores, so we come back to this in the discussion section.

4. Discussion

Further discussion regarding the strengths and limitations of this study would be beneficial. For example; the examination outcome was more important to the Dutch students then the Belgian students - what effect has that had on the results? Students from one Belgian university were advised to prepare for the exam – what effect has this had?

Answer to the reviewer. Dutch students took the test as an examination, while Belgian students did not (except one subgroup of University Two, first year). This issue is now more thoroughly discussed.

Other areas for discussion that would be useful are;
- The educational benefits of collaborative assessment
- The cost of the initial collaboration (question development, ensuring cross-cultural relevance, ect)
- The pros and cons of internationally integrated general practice education, particularly among countries with differing primary health care systems.

Answer to the reviewer: I have incorporated these suggestions in the discussion and therefore three papers from a special issue of Medical Teacher were used. These papers deal with evidence at the undergraduate curriculum and this difference was stressed.

Level of interest: An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests
Quality of written English: Needs some language corrections before being published

Statistical review: No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

Declaration of competing interests:

I declare that I have no competing interests.
Your article regarding the feasibility of a Dutch knowledge test in Belgium is very interesting and relevant. The article should eventually be published. The topic, introduction, research question and outcomes are interesting and important in the international unification of assessment. However, I do think that the article needs some revisions. The main reason is that I think the statistical paragraph as well as the discussion could use more depth and a more scientific foundation. I wish you all the best in adapting – and eventually publishing - the article.

Is question posed well defined?

Answer to the reviewer. Thank you for these encouraging words. We have largely rewritten the introduction and results section.

Minor revisions:

The author does explain the background and context well. However, I think the introduction can use a bit more structure with following attention: What is the message of each paragraph and how do they add up to the research question? Perhaps the second and third paragraph about assessing knowledge – though they pose necessary information for the introduction and should therefore not be removed - can be combined/ shortened and more information about this can be placed in the discussion of the article.

Answer to the reviewer. See above. Combined the suggestions from the first and second reviewer and made the introduction more straightforward.

Are the methods appropriate and well described?

Minor revisions:
The methods are appropriate and well described. There are a few questions that came to mind when reading the methods section:

- Local validation I do want to know more about the senior trainers that analyzed for face validity. Are they GPs? Do they work for the University of Antwerp?

  **Answer to the reviewer: This issue is now explained in the manuscript.**

- Local validation Is it possible to give more information about the questions that have been removed from the test? What does removing the questions mean for the test as a whole?

  **Answer to the reviewer: This issue is now more explicit in the manuscript.**

- Participants Is this study a collaboration with another University? How did you get the data from the Dutch GPs? From what University are the data from Dutch GP trainees and GPs?

  **Answer to the reviewer: This issue is now more explicit in the manuscript.**

**Major revision:**

Statistics I think more detailed information could be given in the statistics section about what descriptives and what tests were to be used. For example, we described continuous data with means plus standard deviation, or another example we did an ANOVA with universities as grouping variable.

Are data sound?
Answer to the reviewer: we have reviewed this technical issue and rewrote the methods and results section. We believe data is sound and methods are used appropriately.

Minor revision:
Are students of year 7,8 and 9 postgraduate students of year 1, 2 and 3?

Answer to the reviewer: 1, 2 and 3 indeed to correspond to 7,8 and 9. I have renamed these and now use 1,2 and 3 all over.

Major revision:
I think more detailed information could be given in the statistics section: Were data normally distributed? What consequences does that have for the choice of the tests of comparison/correlation?

Answer to the reviewer: we have reviewed this technical issue and rewrote the methods and results section. We believe data is sound and methods and statistical techniques were used appropriately.

Adherence for reporting and data deposition?
Yes, the article is build up according to the IMRAD structure. However, I think the results section should only contain results and no discussion.

Are the limitations clearly stated?
Yes. The limitations are stated throughout the discussion.

Do the authors clearly acknowledge work upon which they are building?
As far as my knowledge goes, I think so.

Major revision
I do think that the discussion needs a more solid foundation with references to comparable or related studies in the field of knowledge assessment.
Do the title and abstract accurately convey what has been found?

*Answer to the reviewer:* The suggestions of Reviewers 1 and 2 urged us to rewrite the discussion section. We included papers from a special in Medical Teacher (encompassing the body of evidence at the undergraduate medical curriculum, and to a limited extent of our interest). We hope this now meets their your criteria.

Yes

Is the writing acceptable?

I think the article improves after a language check from a professional interpreter.

*Answer to the reviewer:* a language check was performed by a native speaker.

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Needs some language corrections before being published

Statistical review: Yes, but I do not feel adequately qualified to assess the statistics.

Declaration of competing interests:

I declare that I have no competing interests