Author's response to reviews

Title: What is the impact of a national postgraduate medical specialist education reform on the daily clinical training 3.5 years after implementation? A questionnaire survey.

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Author's response to reviews: see over
Dear Editor

Thank you for the comments from the referees. We have corrected the manuscript according to the referee comments, as follows, and highlighted these changes in the manuscript:

**Reviewer: Sören Huwendick**

**Title:** The title might be misinterpreted. Therefore I suggest changing the title in the following respect: “What is the impact of a national postgraduate medical specialist reform on the daily clinical training 3,5 years after implementation? Results of a questionnaire survey in the North Denmark region”

We have changed the title, but a little shorter than suggested.

**Abstract: methods section.** The reform should be shortly described as done in the methods section of the article so that the reader get a feeling what it is all about: e.g. “change of content and format of PGME in line with outcome-based education using the CanMED’S framework”.

We have added explanation about the reform in the abstract

**Methods:** page 6: It should be described how the questionnaire was developed and whether or not validated and if how.

We have added information about the validation of the questionnaire

**Page 6: Context of study:** A link or publication should be given for the reader who is more interested in this reform.

Unfortunately, it is only written in Danish, with no English summary.

**Discussion:**

Page 13, line:7: It should be explicitly stated that it is a limitation of the study, that the instrument used in this survey is not validated and in the following argued that it seems valid as it corresponds well with the highest rated PHEEM items, as it is already done…

Page 13 line 11: In the sentence: “The questionnaire has been used”: It should be clarified which questionnaire is meant: the PHEEM or the one used in this study…

The discussion has been corrected as suggested, except that the questionnaire actually, as described in the methods, was validated.

**Reviewer David J Hill:**

3. Are the data sound?

The analysis of the data appears to be appropriate. However a statistician’s review would be appropriate. Within the results (Table 1, 2, 3), I could not see the data relevant to the increase in people attending the train the trainers course. (Noted to have increased) There is a fair amount of discussion relating to this without data representation. The involvement of clinicians at all levels in training is one of key recommendations. I believe it needs to be more supported by data. (Major)

In the assessment of the data in Table 2, the presentation is of medians with a percentile range. There is obviously much more statistical analysis within each category for the conclusion of significant changes being achieved. I could not see the evidence of change
for the questions about use of personal learning plans, use of clinical situations or knowing each other. Maybe this should be presented if key discussion is made of these points. (Major)

In the discussion section, fourth paragraph, the comment is of a “mean” and not “median”. This will need to be clarified (Minor)

Between table 2 and table 3 the first question is stated as “Are you meeting for educational appraisal meetings” to “What is the value of the educational appraisal meeting”. What is the correct wording or were they different? (Minor)

The data has been analysed by a hired trained statistician. We have included the suggestions made by referee regarding course attendance. We agree that the changes are small, and small differences become significant in large populations. To make the changes more clear we have changed the figures from median/percentiles to mean/SD values, as the statistician have given both opportunities, and this may clarify the small differences.

4. Does the manuscript adhere to the relevant standards for reporting and data deposition?
   I would prefer to have the additional data that supports the attendance at courses in a table and also the further analysis behind the key findings of significance in table 2 and 3. The conclusions would appear to be valid. (Major)
   We have added the course attendance in table 1 – and reduced the data to only those commented in the discussion and erased the data presentation from the result-text.

5. Are the discussion and conclusions well balanced and adequately supported by the data?
   Within the paper there is an assumption that the trainers are receiving specific training. This does not appear to be detailed. There would be some value in this being briefly outlined. The reason for this is that a specific initiative by the National Board of Health was to have junior doctors attend mandatory courses on communication skills, learning and teaching and management. How does this differ to the other courses that the trainers were undertaken? Or were they the same? (Major)
   The conclusions / recommendations are in two streams. At the research level there is the qualitative assessment of this area with focus groups or departmental based case studies. At an implementation level it is the increased and perhaps mandatory involvement of senior trainers in the courses and improving the educational culture. Both of these are supported from the survey. Another recommendation not discussed is how the parameters of this survey if sufficiently validated can be used in funding or accreditation discussions, such as funding is made available when total compliance with undertaking training of all staff and the completion of in-training-assessments is achieved. (Discretionary)
   The train the trainers course have been thoroughly described in reference 13. We have added a short description in the context section.

   We have not included a discussion of using this questionnaire in monitoring of the reform as we do not find the questionnaire suitable for this, as it is from 2003, before the reform started and probably would include more questions today and have another focus.

8. Do the title and abstract accurately convey what has been found?
   The title is appropriate. I have raised questions about the use of the word efficiency or effectiveness in the abstract. Given the limited amount of resources available for teaching I believe it is raising the effectiveness of that teaching. (Discretionary)
   Efficiency has been corrected
Reviewer Kai Philipp P Schnabel:

Discretionary Revisions:
1. Be a bit more specific about the pilot (methods, results)
2. Page 9, line 1: ...were rather low (<5)... better: ...were rather low (median = 3)...
The pilot have been described in more details and 2. corrected

Minor Essential Revisions:
1. Page 8: line 23: "significant increase in preparations of individual learning plans" (Table 2, both 7(2-9), p< 0.001 (under the assumption there are no mistakes in the numbers, it looks on the first view pretty much the same)). The difference may be significant (with this large numbers of respondents (2003: 2095, 2007: 1788) very small differences appear as significant different), but not very relevant. This can't be read by the reader out of the presented results. One option: present the numbers in another way. E.g. frequency distribution were the difference is visible. Or calculate the mean (just for making the difference visible, 9-point Likert scales are quasi analog) and comment it. Suggestion for the text: use the formulation "slight but significant increase". For a power analysis in advance, what difference would have been defined as the SMD (smallest meaningful difference) for calculating the number of needed questionnaires? What would have been the result for the needed sample size? Less than the numbers of the survey for sure. In this case no significant difference would have been found. (Please do not hesitate contacting me if I could not make this point clear enough).
2. The same for the other two significant differences.

We agree that the changes are small and may become significant easier with the large number of participants. We have included “slight” more in the description and discussion of data and have described this fact explicit in the text. We have changed the values into mean values. We find that including frequency tables will use a lot of space without bringing much more to the reader after we have changed the values into mean values.
To be humble to the small differences we are discussing the changes as tendencies and stress that the reform has not changed much – which might be the depressing message from the study.

Furthermore, as requested, we have had a professional linguistic revision of the manuscript.

We hope you will accept the paper for publishing with the included changes.

On behalf of the authors

Kind regards

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