Author's response to reviews

Title: The views of doctors in their first year of medical practice on the lasting impact of a preparation for house officer course they undertook as final year medical students

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Author's response to reviews: see over
Associate Editor comments:

1. Correlations

The paper now has a statistical problem in the results, which has arisen after a reviewer advised the use of correlation analysis, which is not the appropriate statistical method to assess the level of agreement between the results of two questions measured on agreement scales.

The authors have added correlations as requested (see results pages 9 and 10), but the results are meaningless because the analysis is flawed on a number of counts:

a) it is the wrong analysis - because it would be extraordinary if the hypothesis that the correlation was zero was rejected. Two such similar questions as

The taught part of the course prepared me well for my first FY1 job

and

The taught part of the course did not prepare me well for working as an F1,

which (apart from the fact that one is worded negatively and the other positively) differ only in minor wording, should result in a correlation close to -1

b) the obtained result of -0.45 is not a particularly high correlation, which renders the analysis suspect - either the calculations have been performed wrongly or there is a problem with the data (see d below)

c) a rank correlation rather than product moment correlation should have been used

d) it is not appropriate to regard 'don't know' as the centre of the scale with a score of 3; don't knows should be disregarded as providing no evidence of views

The correct approach I believe is to leave out the don't knows and crosstabulate the replies. For a test one need look no further than McNemar's test - either by reducing the problem to a 2x2 table, combining strongly disagree and disagree, and strongly agree and agree - which would be sufficient - or by looking at extensions to >2 categories.

This is the main correction needed.

Correlations have now been removed and McNemar’s test used. ‘Don’t knows’ have been removed from analysis as have logically incompatible pairs of responses [i.e. when a respondent agrees/strongly agrees or disagrees/strongly disagrees with both statements].

Also, it is important to add the numbers as well as the percentages to be included in Table 4.

Done

I noticed a couple of other minor points:
2. Remove phrase

Towards the foot of page 5, the phrase [the first two years of clinical practice - see below] should now be omitted, as the Foundation Programme has now already been explained at the start of the Methods.

Done

3. Remove definition

Towards the foot of Page 6, Pre-Registration House Officer is spelt out when PRHO is sufficient, the definition having previously been given.

Done