Reviewer's report

Title: Developing counseling skills through pre-recorded videos and role play: a pre- and post-intervention study in a Pakistani medical school.

Version: 2 Date: 12 August 2009

Reviewer: Lynn Y Kosowicz

Reviewer's report:

1. The authors pose a well-defined and useful question: what is the impact of communication skills training, through pre-recorded videos and role play, on the communication skills performance of the participants in this "naive under resourced setup"?

Major Compulsory Revisions:

2. The major deficiency identified by this reviewer is the lack of a control group, which makes attribution of any changes in performance to the intervention less robust. This is not addressed by the authors. The post assessment was conducted 6 months after the intervention. This delay could allow for an interesting assessment of retention of what was learned in the intervention, but it also allows for many other possible intervening influences on the outcome (e.g. perhaps it was the newly instituted Community Medicine rotation alone that influenced performance).

3. Limitations were not adequately addressed in Discussion (e.g. lack of control group, possible bias of observers in the pre and post intervention assessments, small sample size and possible sampling error given the small number of encounters assessed per participant).

4. The conclusions should be modified to reflect the uncertainty of the impact of the videos/role play on the reported results.

5. I feel that although the question posed and conclusions should be revised, the description of the implementation of this curricular change and outcomes measures would still be useful and interesting. Others could learn from this and likely import similar programs. Further study with more robust experimental design is needed.

Minor Essential Revisions:

6. Introduction, 2nd paragraph, line 9 "experimental" should be changed to "experiential"

7. Methods, 6th paragraph, line 7 "as shown in as well" should read "as shown, as well"

8. Methods, 8th paragraph, line 1 "There were only two categories of "done" and "not done" for each item" should read: "There were only two categories, "done" and "not done", for each item.

9. Discussion, paragraph 3, line 1 "Lack of resources to execute performance
based assessment may be implied as one of the reasons of medical institutions not taking this initiative." should be rewritten. Consider: "Lack of resources to execute performance-based assessment may be one of the reasons that some medical institutions have not taken this initiative."

10. Conclusion: line 4 change "improvise" to "revise"

Discretionary Revisions:

11. Methods, paragraph 2, Real patient encounters were observed and on-the-spot feedback was provided regarding their counseling skills. Who were the observers and what were the criteria used for the feedback?

12. Methods: Who was responsible for completing the OSCE checklist assessments (the trained instructors who portrayed patients and physicians for the videos or other observers?) and what was their background? Were they aware of the study question and the intervention? Is there any measure of inter-rater reliability?

13. Methods, paragraph 6, There is a statement that checklists were pretested the previous year - what does this mean and were there changes made after that pretest? If no significant changes were made to the checklists, were the scores of those students similar to the pre-intervention scores of the study subjects?

14. Methods, paragraph 7, Were real patients asked for consent to the video recordings? How many declined?

15. Results- I would like to see the variability and range of scores, in addition to mean scores

16. Results- Would like to see a table of data for each of the 4 scenarios, in addition to the aggregate data for the 4 scenarios combined as shown in the graphs.

17. Participants included 41 females and 13 males, is this the typical mix for this medical school? For medical schools in other developing countries? (this may affect generalizability of results).

18. "SP" is used by ASPE (Association of Standardized Patient Educators) and USMLE as abbreviation for “standardized patient”. It is sometimes also used for “simulated patient”. Suggest using one of these terms, rather than “simulation patient”

19. Discussion, 3rd paragraph, line 4 suggest rewriting "despite the deficiency of technological and staffing resources goes to proof that.." Consider: "despite the deficiency of technological and staffing resources, supports (or demonstrates) that..."

20. Discussion, paragraph 5, line 3 suggest rewording "Significant proof is available towards the utility of such an initiative and its contributions in producing more effective health care providers." Consider: "Significant evidence is available of the utility of such an initiative and its potential contribution to producing more effective health care providers."

21. I would like to see N's and p values on Figures.
22. A couple of additional references that might be useful:


**Level of interest:** An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

**Quality of written English:** Acceptable

**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