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.

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Reviewer: Marta van Zanten

Reviewer's report:

This is an interesting study, especially in light of the fact that the teaching and evaluation of counseling and communication skills is a relatively new phenomenon in Pakistan. Overall this manuscript has merit, but numerous changes are needed to improve the paper and make it more understandable to the reader.

In the Introduction, it would be interesting if the authors would expand on the topic of the shift from paternalism to shared decision making in health communication in Pakistan. Is this a well adopted shift? Do most patients and doctors now prefer this type of patient-centered communication, or is it based on factors such as age of patients and doctors, rural versus urban, gender, etc.?

In the Methods section, the order of events is not clear. The last two sentences of the second paragraph of the Methods section describe students practicing counseling skills and being observed. Then the third paragraph describes the making of the training videos. It would be easier for the reader to understand the study if the description of the development of the tool came before the description of how the tool was used.

In the Results section, the authors describe a DOS checklist which was used to measure counseling skills in a real life setting. A description of this rating tool and how this part of the study was implemented belongs in the Methods section. Also, it is unclear if the DOS checklist is the exact same checklist or a different checklist than what was used to measure communication skills in the OSCEs. If the checklists are not the same, the comparison between the two scales of percentage correct may not be appropriate. Finally, the figures are not really necessary since the same data is presented in the text.

Editorial comments:

The use of ampersands (&) is not appropriate in general text. I would suggest changing the numerous instances of “&” to “and”.

In the Methods section, the acronym ECFMG is used without explanation.

In Figure 3, it is more appropriate to label the genders of medical students as “males” and “females” or “men” and “women” rather than “boys” and “girls”. A few additional typos noted throughout (incorrect or missing words, missing punctuation, misspellings, etc.)
The English writing is acceptable once edits have been made.

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