Author's response to reviews

Title: Pharmacology podcasts (audio lecture recordings): a qualitative study of non-medical prescribing students’ use, perceptions and impact on learning

Authors:

Oonagh Meade (lwxom2@nottingham.ac.uk)
Dianne Bowskill (dianne.bowskill@nottingham.ac.uk)
Joanne S Lymn (joanne.lymn@nottingham.ac.uk)

Version: 2 Date: 25 November 2010

Author's response to reviews: see over
Reviewer: Saran Shantikumar

It's a shame all the participants were female, although this probably would not have restricted their findings significantly.

We agree that it is a limitation of the study that all participants were female. However, the make-up of this cohort of students consisted mainly of females (25 out of 28) and therefore the research sample reflected the characteristics of the class. One male student was invited to take part but did not respond to the invitation. We have added clarifications to the methodology section highlighting this point on page 9 (paragraph 2, lines 2-5 & paragraph 4, lines 1-2) and page 10 (paragraph 1, lines 1-3)

Discretionary Revisions - occasionally a bit 'wordy', including with the participants' comments e.g. p15 interviewee F, the second half of the quote does not add significantly to the point being addressed. (This is a trivial issue though!)

The manuscript has been reviewed to try and reduce the wordiness of the article. Specifically, any parts of the following participant quotes which did not add significantly to the point being addressed were removed: page 14 (interviewee B, lines 17-18), page 15 (interviewee B, lines 2-3 and line 18 & interviewee E, line 24), page 16 (interviewee F, lines 13-14), page 19 (interviewee D, Lines 22-23)
Reviewer: Edward Palmer

This is a well referenced, well written and well discussed paper. I found the content to be useful and enlightening, but that is tempered by the fact that the data used in the paper is only from 7 student interviews. I am not sure how many interviews are appropriate for this type of research and therefore how reliable the conclusions drawn from it can be, but it seems on the low side and for that reason cannot recommend acceptance of the paper.

As the purpose of this research was to gain an in-depth insight into students’ perceptions of pharmacology podcasts, sampling was purposive (Miles and Huberman, 1994).

“Purposive sampling is one technique often employed in qualitative investigation. With a purposive non-random sample the number of people interviewed is less important than the criteria used to select them. The characteristics of individuals are used as the basis of selection, most often chosen to reflect the diversity and breadth of the sample population”

(Wilmot, 2005 www.statistics.gov.uk/about/services/dcm/.../AW_Sampling.pdf)

While a small number of participants were used, 25% of the available cohort were interviewed which is acceptable sample size for the research questions particularly bearing in mind the purposive nature of the sampling which allowed us to interview low, medium and high users of the podcasts thus allowing us to gain a breadth of student experiences.

I do believe the work is worth publishing in some format, and wonder whether the authors would be prepared to reverse the structure of the paper. If they developed a series of guidelines for learning using podcasts and used their data (from the interviews and from their previous paper) to support it I believe that would not only be justifiable but would add something significant to the literature.

While the reviewer’s suggestion of re-formatting the paper in terms of a series of guidelines is interesting and worthwhile, it is outside the remit of this particular piece of research. It is something which the authors would be interested in pursuing in terms of writing a discussion paper for educators which would include tips and lessons learned about using podcasts in academic settings. There are also a number of existing articles which cover this type of information (e.g. Tripp et al., 2006; Sandars, 2009).
Reviewer: John Sandars

Major Compulsory Revisions

[1] The title should more clearly reflect the “podcast” as audio lecture capture and the context (especially since in a medical education journal)

The words “Audio lecture recordings” have been added to article title to clarify the type of podcasts which were made available to students. The title also does reflect the context of the intervention as the target group of student i.e. non-medical prescribing students are mentioned.

[2] The abstract should specify what they mean by “podcast” - this appears to be a full audio capture of a lecture downloaded from a VLE and also the unique context - non-medical and older (average age was 43)

-A clarification has been added to the method section of the abstract which points out that the podcast took the form of an audio lecture recording housed in an online VLE (Page 2, paragraph 2, lines 3-5).

-To clarify the unique context of the study in terms of the older student group, we have added in the mean age of participants and clarified that the students were all nurses in the method section of the abstract (Page 2, paragraph 2, line 1).

-We have also added in the conclusion section of the abstract that the results are specific to this older group of post-registration students (Page 3, paragraph 1, lines 7-8).

[3] The initial introduction on "podcasting" should more fully describe what the educational intervention was - a downloadable audio file of an entire lecture from a VLE.

The educational intervention is now more fully described beginning on page 4 (paragraph 3, line 8) and continuing on to page 5 (paragraph 1, lines 1-6)

[4] The introduction should include the different types of podcasts (eg RSS fed/edited/enhanced with video or PowerPoint) and summarise the previous findings on perceived usefulness and usability - both from non-medical and nursing / medical. The evidence base is slim in journals but there are more unpublished reports from Google that are relevant. It is essential to compare like with like - that is, simple audio capture with edited or enhanced.

-The different types of podcasts used in academic settings are described on Page 4, paragraph 2, lines 2-8. Two additional references [16 and 17] retrieved from Google have been added in to this section
Previous evidence on perceived usefulness and usability in both medical and non-medical settings have now been more clearly summarised beginning on page 4 (paragraph 3, lines 5-8) continuing on page 5 (paragraph 1, lines 1-6 and paragraph 3, lines 1-9) and on to page 6 (paragraph 1, lines 4-19)

[5] The introduction should summarise the findings of their previously published paper since there is frequent referral back to this paper.

The findings from our previous study are now more clearly described on page 4 paragraph 3 line 8 – page 5, paragraph 1 lines 1-6) and page 6 (paragraph 1, lines 4-11)

[6] The uniqueness of the context should be made clear - older /non-medical. The previous studies are almost entirely young undergraduate students.

The conclusion section of the abstract emphasises that the results are specific to this particular group of students (Page 3, paragraph 1, lines 7-8).

The unique nature of the study group is described in the introduction (Page, 6, paragraph 2, lines 1-5 & Page 7, paragraph 1, lines 1-17) including that they are an older group of students, who are working while studying and engaging in a non-medical prescribing qualification.

-Similarly in the discussion section, the uniqueness of this group of mature learners in terms of their multiple time commitments is highlighted (Page 22, paragraph 2, line 1-6).

-Similarly the uniqueness of this study group is highlighted as a potential weakness of the study (Page 26, paragraph 2, lines 1-9).

[7] The data analysis used a purposive sample of high and low users and it would be useful to see how the themes and illustrative comments related to these groups.

Most themes were highlighted by high, medium and low users. Clarifications have been added to the results section to highlight where themes were identified by all groups of participants (e.g. page 12, paragraph 3, line 11; page 13, paragraph 4, line 1; page 14, paragraph 4, lines 3-4; page 18, paragraph 6, line 2; page 19, paragraph 3, line 3)).

Where themes were only evident in specific groups of users, this has now been highlighted in the results section (Page 14, paragraph 1, line 1 & page 16 paragraph 6, line 2) and in the discussion section (page 24, paragraph 2, line 3).

[8] The discussion should emphasise the unique context and clearly state how the results are similar/different to other studies in undergraduates, especially with audio only full lecture capture, and if any studies in older students
In the discussion section, the differences between this and other studies, particularly in relation to the unique student group, has been clarified (Page 22, paragraph 1, line 13-15 and paragraph 2 lines 1-6).

Similarly the uniqueness of this study group is highlighted as a potential weakness of the study (Page 26, paragraph 2, lines 1-9).

Similarities between reasons for student use of podcasts in our study and reasons for students use of supplementary podcasts which were enhanced in other studies (e.g. using video/ linking the podcasts to powerpoint presentations) are made in the discussion (Page 22, paragraph 1, lines 3-7 and lines 14-17).

Comparisons between other studies in terms of student age groups and student tendency not use the full portability of the podcasts are made in Page 21, paragraph 2, lines 1-6.

[9] The discussion needs to include problems related to listening to full length audio only lecture capture and suggestions how they can be overcome.

-Problems related to listening to full-length lecture recordings are highlighted in the discussion section in terms of initial problems downloading podcasts to mp3 players, the need for early IT support, and the need for advancement in online VLEs to support podcasts. Similarly, steps we have taken to try to move podcasts to a website outside WebCT in order to increase the accessibility of podcasts have been discussed (page 23, paragraph 2, lines 6-17).

-Barriers in terms of the time commitment required to access full-length recordings are discussed also and suggestions are made that increasing the portability of podcasts could reduce the burden on students in terms of listening to podcasts via their computers by allowing them to access podcasts whilst doing other activities (page 23, paragraph 3, lines 1-4 & page 24, paragraph 1, lines 1-4).

[10] The submitted article would benefit from careful proof reading for style eg avoiding phrases such as "in an in depth fashion" etc.

The article has been proof read and any minor amendments for style have been made.