Reviewer's report

Title: Does the inclusion of 'professional development' teaching improve medical students' communication skills?

Version: 1 Date: 8 November 2010

Reviewer: Andreas Möltner

Reviewer's report:

The authors investigated the consequences of a new curriculum on observed communication skills and the relationship to students’ attitudes and performance in an OSCE.

Major Compulsory Revisions

Design:
How many students were in each cohort (total number of students at the medical school, number of students participating in the questionnaire study)?

Teaching intervention:
How many teachers held the courses? Is it possible, that teacher effects influenced the results? If yes, you have to control the teacher effect, e. g. by analysing the data with teacher as factor (this is the nastiest point in my review)

Procedure:
Rating of observed communication
How many videos were rated by each tutor?
In the “Results” section, you say that you obtained 198 videos. Without the one you discarded you have 197 videos. 30% were double-coded, but 30% of 197 are 59, not 53? This is unclear.

Inter-rater reliability
This section includes results, you should move them to the appropriate section.
Table 1: Please add number of observations to the legend (n=53?).
Bland-Altman is all right, but I think you should report also the correlation coefficient of the first and second ratings.

Analyses:
Add a short comment to the power of the statistical analyses (which effect sizes can be detected by a t-test with group sizes of 35 and 47 and a power of .8 ...?).

Results
The impact of professional …

Table 2: Please add in the legend, which test is meant. I assume, it’s the difference between old and new curriculum. In the text you say, there is no difference of the total scores in year 1. But in the table the values are bold. For year 2, p is .054, in the table mean values are also bold (you may use italic for .05<p<.10). Same for body posture in year 2.

It may be also interesting, to know the effect sizes in table 2. Add two columns for year 1 and year 2?

Interview rating scale …

The results have to be reported, p-values are not sufficient. You can enlarge Table 2.

Relationship between...

I think you should also report the raw correlation coefficients (without partialling out the scores of year 1) in Table 3.

Add the correlations of the relationship with OSCE-performance to table 3.

Discussion

When discussing the results you should keep in mind that you did a lot of testing, so some of the significant results may be spurious (I believe this for the inverse relationship between IRS in year 1 and year 5 OSCE for old curriculum students, but I don’t know that).

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: Yes, and I have assessed the statistics in my report.

Declaration of competing interests:

I declare that I have no competing interests