Author’s response to reviews

Title: Analysing the operative experience of basic surgical trainees in Ireland using a web-based logbook

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Author’s response to reviews: see over
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Professor Samy Azer
Associate Editor
BMC Medical Education

Dear Professor Azer:

Thank you for indicating our manuscript titled “Analysing the operative experience of basic surgical trainees in Ireland using a web-based logbook” maybe suitable for publication in BMC Medical Education pending revision. We would like to thank the reviewers for their time and thoughtful comments. We have addressed their comments point-by-point below:

**Reviewer: Kun-Long Hung**

**Comment:** “Among the National Basic Surgical Training (BST) programme in Ireland, only those for general surgery and orthopaedic training were analysed. Therefore, to fit the content of the text, the title of the manuscript may focus the target as "Analysing the operative experience of basic surgical trainees in Ireland using a web-based logbook for general surgery and orthopaedic training”

**Reply:** We appreciate that our data is for general surgery and orthopaedics only and this is not specifically reflected in the title. The National Basic Surgical Training programme is core programme in surgical training taken by all surgical trainees in preparation for entry to Higher Surgical Training (e.g. orthopaedics or general surgery). Therefore, to avoid confusion with speciality surgical training in Ireland and to provide a concise title we chose not to include those terms.

**Comment:** “The data presented in this study include the levels of "assisted" and "performed". What is data of "supervision" level as described in the National BST programme?”

**Reply:** The eLogbook used in this study, allows trainees to record their role in the operation, either as “assisted” or “performed”. The “performed” category includes operations where the trainee performed the operation independently (i.e. unsupervised) or with senior supervision. The eLogbook is designed for trainees at all levels of training and whether a basic surgical trainee performed an operation independently is not as relevant at this stage in their surgical training. Therefore, for the purpose of our study we combined both these groups. Our study found that junior trainees are participating in adequate numbers of operations but not as the primary operator. When the trainee assists with an operation, the eLogbook does not allow the trainee to record the level of training (e.g. senior resident or consultant/attending surgeon) of the primary operator. With challenges facing surgical training at all levels, we suspect that many procedures traditionally performed by junior trainees have now shifted to more senior trainees. We hope to address this in future versions of the eLogbook.
Reviewer: Seiji Yamashiro

Comment: ‘I want to know about the result of the experience for other surgical specialties beside general surgery and orthopedics during basic surgical training.’

Reply: All basic surgical trainees must complete at least two 6-month posts in general surgery. A further 6-months in either emergency medicine or trauma orthopaedics. The remaining 6-months can be in any of the surgical specialities, such as urology, plastics, neurosurgery, paediatric surgery etc. As a result, we have very small numbers of trainees (usually less than 10) with logbook data for each of these specialities. Therefore, drawing meaningful conclusions about operative exposure in these specialities is very difficult.

Comment: “Authors said that under-reporting or inappropriate reporting might be challenging in this data. In addition, it is more important to check each trainee’s quality of procedure skill.”

Reply: We agree with Dr. Yamashiro that logbook data alone does not imply competency and that the level of operative exposure required for proficiency will vary greatly amongst individuals. We firmly believe that surgical logbooks are important but should be used as part of a global assessment framework rather than in isolation. All basic surgical trainees in Ireland are assessed bi-annually at a Competence Assessment and Performance Appraisal (CAPA) review, where their logbooks are reviewed along with trainer references, and participation in structured learning, human factors training and the operative surgical skills programme.

Editorial Corrections

Figures: the figure titles have now been removed from both figures.

Ethics: this study was exempt from ethical review by the Research Ethics Committee of the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland as the data was collected for the purpose of auditing basic surgical training in Ireland and is purely observational in nature. All data was anonymised before analysis and all trainees gave consent for their logbooks to be accessed and analysed. A statement to this effect has now been included in the Methods section.

Yours sincerely,

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