Reviewer's report

Title: How satisfied are students with peer teaching in clinical communication skills?

Version: 3 Date: 14 June 2014

Reviewer: Lezley-Anne Hanna

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Discretionary Revision
(1) Title: perhaps rephrase so as this is no longer a question.
For example:
An assessment/investigation of student satisfaction with peer teaching of clinical communication skills
An assessment/investigation of student satisfaction with peer, academic, and clinician-led teaching of clinical communication skills

(3) Figure 1 is not really necessary since the majority of questions are also provided in Table 1. You could explain in the text that there were a total of 5 closed questions and one free response section for participants to record any other comments. You could then refer the reader to Table 1 for three questions which were scored from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree) and state that the other two questions (the session kept to time; I had the opportunity to role play) required yes/no responses.

There is a third discretionary revision provided as a separate attachment.

Minor essential revisions

Abstract
(1) Introduction: rather than saying ‘this paper examines’, say ‘this work aimed to establish …’ so that it is clearer to readers what the aims/objectives were from the outset.

(2) Method order: (a) some information about the teaching session and facilitators (b) how data were collected via a questionnaire (n=x questions) and (c) how data were analysed.

(3) Results: include the number of participants and the questionnaire response rate. In general, further quantification within this section is also required. Perhaps clarify that there was no significant difference found in satisfaction scores. Maybe change ‘students noted…’ to ‘students considered that their communication skills had improved…’

Also, quantify this sentence ‘x% students considered…’ so that ‘with the same number finding…’ makes more sense.
Conclusion: rephrase the first sentence: the results section starts off with ‘students were highly satisfied’ and the conclusion begins in a very similar way: ‘students are satisfied…’

Manuscript
Introduction

It would be beneficial to know where across the globe peer teaching is utilized (i.e. expand on this to appeal to an international audience). Also, is it only used in medicine (thinking about readers from other disciplines)?

‘Viewed variably’ - provide some examples of the differing views.

Provide a reference for the National Student Survey (NSS)

‘A systematic review by [16]’ should be: ‘A systematic review by Yu et al. (2011)…’

Methods

Before the session: who led the facilitator and student training? (was it one of the academics that was also being evaluated?) How long were these training sessions?

It would be useful to know more about the facilitators. For example, were the clinicians experienced in teaching within a university setting? How many facilitators were trained (by role)? How were final year students selected for facilitation roles (I presume it only involved a small proportion of final year students).

How many students were in the year group and how were participants allocated to each group? (random allocation?)

Did the students have prior clinical knowledge of the topics before the simulated role-plays?

Expand on the learning objectives of the session

Mandatory small group teaching: useful to explicitly state that the session did not count towards their grades/module mark (just that attendance was compulsory) so students were unlikely to object to it being led by one facilitator over another.

Did the sessions run concurrently or throughout the first semester? If they ran throughout the semester, were students who had later sessions at an advantage because they heard about it from peers, and does this needs to be mentioned as a limitation)?

You could outline how this questionnaire was developed (and by whom) and whether it was piloted. Also, clarify how it was distributed/collected in after the session and that it was anonymous.
The ‘ethics of the questions were considered’ may be confusing terminology for readers.

Results

The method mentions 24 seminar groups; the results mention 20 seminar groups.

Having mentioned how many students and facilitators were trained in the method section, it would be useful to outline how many actually participated in the workshop (again by role).

I think Figure 2 is surplus to requirements, given that you also discuss the very same results within the text. A pie-chart showing 20.71%, 48.99% and 30.30% is not really necessary (over and above just describing what these figures relate to within the text). It would be different if the results were complicated and benefitted from being displayed graphically.

Table 1: is it really necessary for the reader to see all paired results (i.e. the positive and negative values)? If so, it might be easier if the pairs were grouped and reported together for each question:

Clinician/academic staff… 0.06804…
Academic staff/Clinician… -0.06804…
Clinician/Clinical student… 0.04390…
Clinical student/Clinician… -0.04390…
Academic staff/Clinical student…0.02414…
Clinical student/Academic staff…-0.02414…

You mention that the raters independently read through the comments and suggested recurring themes. I presume the next stage was for them to discuss and agree on key themes, prior to going off and independently assigning comments to one or more of these themes.

When providing verbatim quotations, it might be useful to using a coding system such as S for student, assign a number that can be traced/link to their questionnaire, and finally list the facilitator type (A-Academic, C – Clinician etc.) For example, S14-A could relate to a quote from Student 14 who had an academic member of staff as their facilitator.

In the table, you refer to ‘clinical student’, yet for the quotations and text you refer to ‘peer-teacher’. Better to only use one term.

Discussion

This point refers to the whole manuscript, including the abstract: sometimes you refer to ‘near-peer teaching’, whereas other times you refer to ‘peer
teaching’, ‘final year peer-teachers’, ‘clinical students’. It might be easier for the reader if there was a more consistent term used throughout.

(24) Did any of the final year medical students (the peer-teachers) comment about the time commitment to undertake this (on top of their own workload)? While they may indeed provide a cost-effective learning resource, it may adversely affect their own performance.

(25) Students wanted more sessions – so would you do anything differently in the future, on reflection?

Implications

(26) You mention an increase in tuition fees - if medical undergraduate students are paying substantial fees, do you think they will really appreciate being taught by their peers rather than experienced academics/clinicians? If the workshop was assessed and contributed to the degree classification, students might prefer to be taught by an experienced academic than someone who was a few years ahead of them.

(27) You mention that future studies could investigate this (the impact of the facilitator-type on summative assessment) - this work would be harder to justify in case some students from the cohort ended up with lower grades as a result of the facilitator they were assigned to.

(28) Should academic members of staff be concerned (in terms of the quality of their own teaching) if students are equally satisfied with a peer-teacher? Also, does it undermine the need for academic staff to have further teaching qualifications (such as a postgraduate certificate in higher education teaching), if clinicians and peer-teachers can achieve the same results with minimum training?

References

(29) These are not consistently written:
Sometimes an issue number is included (for example, refs 3 and 10) and other times it is not.
Sometimes there is a full stop at the end of the reference and other times not.
Sometimes the journal name is abbreviated (for example ref 8) and other times it is not.
Sometimes the journal name is in bold italic font (for example, ref 7) and other times it is not.

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

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