Author's response to reviews

Title: A survey of medical students to assess their exposure to and knowledge of renal transplantation

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Dear Sir
We would like to resubmit in consideration for publication in BMC Medical Education a revised manuscript entitled “A survey of medical students to assess their exposure to and knowledge of renal transplantation”.

Below, we have detailed a point-by-point response to the comments by reviewer one, Elke Schaeffner. In addition, we have detailed specific changes that have been made to the manuscript. We agree with the comments of Elke Schaeffner that the topic covered is both interesting and has an important impact and hope that it will be considered more favourably now that significant changes have been made.

Authors comments in response to the report of Elke Schaeffner

MAJOR COMPULSORY REVISIONS

Methods

We felt that a number of the reviewer's comments on the "basic" methods section were valid and have expanded this section accordingly. Specifically we have addressed the following points:

. We know that all 140 students attended the fair, as a register was taken.
. The issue of selection bias is covered in the discussion.
. Further details of the distribution, completion and collection of the questionnaire are now included in the Methods section.
. Details of the transplant activity of the two regional centres are now included in the Results section and the statistical significance of the impact that this activity may have on the exposure to transplantation is calculated.
. The separating of the questionnaire into exposure and knowledge questions has been mentioned in the methods section.
. Whilst we acknowledge the reviewers comments about the wording of our questionnaire there is little that can be done about this now. We will of course take these comments on board when designing any future questionnaires.
. However, we do not believe that the wording of the questionnaire weakens it usefulness of assessing exposure and knowledge to the field.
The questionnaire was initially piloted electronically. This was not mentioned in the original manuscript as it was sent using a different medium and so some of the questions had to be asked a different way. For example, the question regarding the site of surgical incision did not include a diagram and the answers to this proved to be slightly ambiguous. Also, there was obviously little control over how long students took to answer the questions and whether they looked up the answers. However, the results of this pilot study clearly demonstrated that the questionnaire was easy to follow and that the standard of questions asked was about right for the level of training.

Results

The comment about the opening sentence of the 4th paragraph has been addressed.

There are now 3 questions each upon which we make our conclusions about knowledge and exposure. We do not believe that this is far fetched. Although far more detailed questions could have been asked about the field of renal transplantation we felt that the questions posed were aimed at the correct level for undergraduates. In addition, we felt that students were less likely to complete a questionnaire longer than a single side of A4.

MINOR ESSENTIAL REVISIONS

Background

References have been included to address the two points made.

- There is clear evidence that renal transplantation increases life expectancy and quality of life for patients with end stage renal failure.
- A recent study performed in Germany has demonstrated that health professionals with an increased knowledge of organ donation are more likely to carry a donor card and feel more comfortable about approaching the relatives of potential donors. The implication of these results is that better education about this subject may in turn lead to better rates of organ donation due to the actions of health professionals.
- In addition, previous studies have shown that surgical trainees list lack of exposure to the speciality as a reason for not choosing transplantation as a career. Calls have been made by the British Transplantation Society to increase this exposure, starting with undergraduates at UK medical schools. However, to date, no evidence exists regarding the current amount of exposure to and knowledge of transplantation in this population.

SPECIFIC CHANGES IN THE MANUSCRIPT

Introduction

References have been inserted to support the points about: 1. Transplantation improving quality of life and increasing life expectancy. 2. Measures to deal with recruitment and donation of organs being aimed at future doctors.

Methods

This section has been completely re-written as per the reviewer's points.

Results

In the first three paragraphs, information has been inserted about the transplant activity at the two centres and statistical analysis performed of how this affects exposure to transplantation.

Discussion

A new paragraph (number four) has been inserted that deals with the limitations of the study. In the fifth paragraph a recent study has been quoted that provides evidence for the relationship between exposure to transplantation and attitude towards it.

Once again we would like to point out that all of the authors have contributed to this original study. It has not been published elsewhere, and is not currently being considered by any other journal.
We look forward to hearing your decision about this revised manuscript in the near future.

Yours faithfully,

Miss Anusha Edwards
Mr Andrew Weale
Mr Justin Morgan