Author's response to reviews

Title: Using the Ages and Stages Questionnaire to teach medical students developmental assessment: a descriptive analysis

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Thank you for your comments regarding my manuscript Using the Ages and Stages Questionnaire to teach medical students developmental assessment: a descriptive analysis. The following changes have been made:

Reviewer 2

1. Principle study aims clarified into 3 points and a brief introductory paragraph added to summarise the study.

2. Detail added regarding methods; specifically, student and parent recruitment (this was a convenience sample), participation rates, consent and ethical considerations.

3. More detail was added about the questionnaires used and their rationale for use. ASQ reliability and validity studies were tested for use on a population basis on non-risk and at-risk groups with similar results. The students are not expected to diagnose but to learn to assess normal development and therefore recognise when the child is not developing within normal limits.

4. Student bias had been commented on in the discussion. A summary has now been added to the discussion section.

5. The graduate survey results have been removed as whilst they provided the impetus for the program, they are confusing, not sufficiently representative and were not part of my original evaluation. On reflection it is better to only use the results of the end of term SPOT evaluation for which more detail has been supplied.

6. The parent responses have been added to the results section and the table removed as I agree, it was superfluous.

Reviewer 1

1. Evaluation - the 52 students were a convenience sample.

2. Results - sentence on 70% agreement changed as suggested and the method clarified so that is clear that the students completed an assessment using the Stycar guidelines and the parents completed the ASQ.

3. The discussion has been revised to address the reviewer's comments about the discussion. Recent data is now available from 2005; it is still not significant but shows a trend toward an increase in confidence. Student and colleague comments suggest that developmental assessment across a range of age groups is a difficult skill to learn and that exposure to this difficulty could result more self awareness makes intuitive sense in clinical practice for beginning practitioners. The results also strengthen my thoughts that Likert scales are insufficiently sensitive for confidence ratings for students; it takes a very confident beginning practitioner to say they strongly agree that they are confident in a skill. A comment has been added for
future studies to explore the relationship between confidence and competence in this skill as this is unclear

Regards

Pam Nicol