Author's response to reviews

Title: Using a conceptual framework during learning attenuates the loss of expert-type knowledge structure.

Authors:

Kerry Novak (knovak@ucalgary.ca)
Henry Mandin (henry.mandin@calgaryhealthregion.ca)
Elizabeth Wilcox (elizabeth.wilcox@utoronto.ca)
Kevin McLaughlin (kevin.mclaughlin@calgaryhealthregion.ca)

Version: 4 Date: 30 May 2006

Author's response to reviews: see over
May 22, 2006

Editorial team,
BMC Medical Education,

Dear Dr. Sirs/Madams,

Re: Manuscript No. 8898403518761030 “Using a conceptual framework during learning attenuates the loss of expert-type knowledge structure.”

Thank you once again for enclosing the helpful reviews of this manuscript and for the opportunity to resubmit a revised version of the manuscript. I have addressed each of the reviewer’s comments as detailed below.

Reviewer: Dr. Eva

I have deleted the justification for dichotomizing the data.

I have reversed the order of Figure 2 and 3.

The spelling of McGaghie has been corrected.

Reviewer: Dr. Wattenmaker

Dr. Wattenmaker is requesting a completely different study, i.e., an RCT evaluating the use of diagnostic schemes as an educational intervention. While I agree that such a study is desirable, I cannot revise this study such that it sounds like an RCT. It is, as stated in the methods and restated in the limitations section, a small observational study. Such studies are, however, required to justify RCTs and are, therefore, worthy of reporting in their own right.

As for strengthening the limitations section, I have already stated that observational studies are used to generate hypotheses and cannot imply causality. I have also noted the
small number of subjects in this study and the need to test the hypotheses generated in the form of an RCT. I have also added a caution regarding generalizing these results to other clinical presentations in addition to limitations regarding the measurement of knowledge structure in general and as it relates to concept sorting. I am not really sure how I can strengthen the limitations further as I believe I have addressed all the possible limitations as I see them, including all those mentioned by the reviewers.

I apologize that I am unable to revise this study in the way that that Dr. Wattenmaker has recommended. Based upon these results, however, we are conducting an RCT to test the hypothesis generated by this study. I hope that with the changes that I have made the manuscript is now acceptable for publication.

Thanking you in anticipation.

Yours faithfully,

Dr. Kevin McLaughlin
(Corresponding Author)