Author's response to reviews

Title: Learning while Evaluating: The Use of an Electronic Evaluation Portfolio in a Geriatric Medicine Clerkship

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Version: 3 Date: 28 November 2005

Author's response to reviews: see over
Montreal, November 28, 2005

Dr. Peter Newmark  
Editor-in-Chief, *BMC*-series titles

Dear Dr. Newmark,

My colleagues and I would like to re-submit for your consideration our manuscript entitled: “Learning while Evaluating: The Use of an Electronic Evaluation Portfolio in a Geriatric Medicine Clerkship”.

We received the constructive comments from the reviewers and we have made changes to our manuscript following their recommendations. The changes made to our manuscript include:

- **From reviewer 1:**
  - My only real substantive concern about the manuscript is whether the evaluation of the introductory session is interesting and useful enough to warrant publication.

We consider that the article in general points up not only to the importance of the introductory session but also to the importance of this method as an additional evaluation tool to the learning environment in clinical settings. We consider that this point was not clear in the first version of the manuscript when the hypothesis were stated in page 5, second paragraph. Therefore, we included the statement that we had two hypotheses concerning both the usefulness of the introductory session and the utility of the evaluation method (page 5, line 9, second paragraph).

- **Are the 50% of the students in the initial surveys who strongly to somewhat agree to feeling comfortable using the MEEP the same ones who were in the mandatory introductory sessions?**

This important point highlighted by the reviewer was clarified in page 7, third paragraph, line 6.
- The number of evaluation postings (approx 30 per student) is impressive and suggests that the method is successful in promoting self-reflection. However, what is the quality of this postings? Did a substantial number of postings result in the kind of negotiated learning, dialogue and goal-setting between tutor and student that the authors believe is possible? or are students postings (and tutors responses) less productive? There is no mention of the quality of the postings, and the number alone doesn't suggest effectiveness.

We agree with the reviewer that this issue has to be clarified in the manuscript. First, concerning students self-assessment, we modified page 11, third paragraph, lines 3-5 where we explained that only those evaluations that included comments and action plans were counted and considered as a self-reflection exercise. Additionally, we modified the discussion accordingly (page 13, paragraph 3, lines 5-9).

By contrast, concerning the reviewer’s comment about negotiated learning between tutor and students we decided to comment on this issue in page 14 where we included a second paragraph. Finally, the goal of referring the readers to a sample of our MEEP (reference 7) in page 13, last line, is to demonstrate the quality of the students postings as well as the student-tutor interaction.

- Did the order of the clerkships rotations make a difference in evaluations? Did students who completed the Geri clerkship first or second have different evaluations about the MEEP (or different reactions to the introductory session) than those for whom Geri was the 10th rotation?

Thanks to the reviewer suggestion, we looked again at our database and we did not find any differences concerning the order of the clerkships and students perceptions. We reported our findings in page 12, paragraph 1, lines 5-7.

- Other changes:
  - We have formatted the manuscript and tables according to the suggested template from BioMed Central.
  - References have been formatted accordingly
  - We changed the numbers in table 1 to follow the consistence of the other tables by using percentages.

We consider that we have fully addressed all the reviewers concerns which have significantly improved the quality of our manuscript. We hope that this manuscript is now suitable for publication as a research article in BMC-Medical Education.
Sincerely,

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