Author's response to reviews

Title: General Practice as a career choice among undergraduate medical students in Greece

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Author's response to reviews: see over
Answers to Reviewers’ comments

Reply to Reviewer 1 (Ms Grayson)

Major Compulsory Revisions

1. The study reports on some interesting trends. However, the low number of respondents for a one year study makes the validity of the findings a bit questionable. I would suggest that the study be repeated for several graduating classes and/or include students from other Greek medical schools in the study. More than 6 students in the pGP category are needed to draw some useful conclusions.

We acknowledge the low participation rates in the primary phase of our study, although several factors. To our surprise, the number of medical students who stated that they would select General Practice as a career option was extremely low. In order to improve the validity of the results, we repeated the questionnaire during the current academic year (2006-2007), from September to December 2006, while the manuscript was under review in the BMC Medical Education. The students who participated and were added to our final sample, were not only those who were in the sixth (final) year of their academic studies but also all graduating students who had not successfully completed their studies during the predefined 6 years of the Athens’ medical school curriculum. The total number of participants finally reached 1021, improving the validity of the results. It should be also noticed that we submitted the first manuscript in August 2006, before we expanded our study.

2. A more precise description of the survey is needed for the paper. (it also might be useful to include a copy of the survey for clarification). Some of the areas that need clarification are as follows:

The reason for choosing the medical specialty - Were students instructed to pick just one reason, choose all that apply, rank order the reasons, or rate them on a Likert scale? Table 1 suggests the former, but this should be described in the methods.

The students were instructed to pick only one reason for choosing the medical specialty –the most influential according to their opinion -, selecting between four proposed options or writing in their personal reasons. The issue is clarified in the methods section

There is also some confusion because the authors state 4 reasons, but the table has 6 reasons. If two of these were obtained when students wrote in other options, they should probably be listed under "other" in the table with a description of these in the text.
Lower chances for unemployment and better quality of life were indeed two reasons that were not initially included in the questionnaire but were obtained afterwards from the results. Table 1 is now reconstructed according to the reviewer’s suggestions and the two novel criteria are analytically described in the results section.

3. Describe questions listed in 2nd paragraph under survey instrument. Were the questions on potential problems during residency, selection, etc. open or closed-ended?

All questions were closed-ended and the participants were invited to select only one of the predefined choices. All questions have been clarified in the aforementioned paragraph.

4. Also need clarification of question format regarding GP/FM as specialty, source of info, etc. Were these set categories or open-ended? Were students allowed to choose more than one option? It is possible that a student could have heard about GP from more than one source.

Again, the answers were pre-defined and the students were invited to choose the one that fitted the best to their opinion. We agree with the reviewer that a student might have heard about GP from more than one source, but it was our choice for only one answer in order to produce more straightforward results.

5. how were sociodemographic data determined? For ex, how was urban vs semi-urban defined and categorized?

Age, gender and parents’ profession were self-reported. The area of origin was also self-reported. After collecting the data, we were based on the Greek National Census of 2001 (General secretariat of national statistical service of Greece. Athens. P_1. Population, surface and density by urban/rural areas. (In Greek). Available from: http://www.statistics.gr (last accessed on 11 December 2006) in order to categorize the reported area of origin to urban, semi-urban and rural. This is now stated in the Material and Methods section (Survey Instrument and Procedure)

6. Was computer literacy a yes/no question and was it self-rated?

Computer literacy was a yes/no question. The participant was invited to state if he/she had any kind of certification regarding computer literacy.

7. What were the 4 choices for the definition of GP?

The 4 definitions of General Practice the medical student was invited to choose were:
1. General approach of Medicine with basic knowledge of the main Medical specialties
2. First aid to patients with emergency medical conditions in remote/underserved regions
3. Humanistic oriented approach of Medicine with aim to prevent, treat and rehabilitate
4. Primary care services for common medical problems and reference to the appropriate expert
The 4 definitions are now stated in the Material and Methods section (Survey Instrument and Procedure)

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Minor Essential Revisions (such as missing labels on figures, or the wrong use of a term, which the author can be trusted to correct)

1. Results should be reported in order. Findings relating to Tables 3 and 4 (relating to source of information) were reported prior to findings for table 2

Results are now reported in order following the table sequence.

2. the sentence in results that refers to references 17-19 is not a finding of this study. This piece of information should be moved to the discussion section.

The sentence is now moved in the discussion section

3. Figure 1 is missing from the paper!

There was no figure, this was a mistake and is now corrected.

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Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)

1. You might want to briefly describe the health care system in Greece, especially which fields are considered primary care. This would be useful for readers not familiar with the Greek system. For instance, in the US, primary care is comprised of 3 specialties- family medicine, general internal medicine and general pediatrics.

The Greek Primary Health Care system is now briefly explained in the Introduction section

2. The format of the tables is a bit difficult to follow with both vertical and horizontal findings. You might want to just report data in rows on the tables, and put the column information in the text. It would also be helpful to have "N(%)" on top of each column to clarify the numbers below. you do state that at the bottom of the table, but it would make it clearer.

We have changed the format of the tables, according to the reviewer’s recommendations.

3. Consider changing the title. the study looks at many influences on the choice of GP as a career, not just undergraduate training programs.
The title is changed according to editor’s suggestion.
Reply to Reviewer 2 (Mr. McManus)

Major points

1. My recommendation is that the paper is accepted subject to modification (and the present referee has made a number of pertinent points on description of scales and the like), and that the authors remove the inferential tests that are present — none would reach significance given any form of Bonferroni correction — and simply describe what they have found. The paper could be shorter as a result, but the power of that simple number six would come through much more. And presumably it is not without implication within Greece, and it will be of interest elsewhere.

We tried to limit our results section, but what should also be taken under consideration is the fact that in order to improve the validity of the study, more students were finally included in the study population. As a consequence, the results have changed and we think that the inferential tests can remain without limiting the study’s value.

Minor points.

1– p.5. The comment that few medical students are choosing GP in "Europe and North America" is far too sweeping, not least because no other data are reported for Europe. In the UK, at least, the popularity goes up and down over time, but there are always substantial numbers interested in GP as a career.

We have changed our comment in the Introduction section to a more conservative statement.

2. The comment in the last line about power and non-parametric statistics is wrong).

The study sample has been changed and this comment has been removed