Author's response to reviews

Title: Observed Communication Skills: How Do They Relate To The Consultation Content? A nation-wide study of graduate medical students seeing a standardized patient for a first-time consultation in a general practice setting.

Authors:

Tore Gude (tore.gude@medisin.uio.no)
Per Vaglum (p.j.w.vaglum@medisin.uio.no)
Tor Anvik (tor.anvik@ism.uit.no)
Anders Baerheim (anders.barheim@isf.uib.no)
Hilde Eide (Hilde.Eide@su.hio.no)
Ole Fasmer (ole.fasmer@psyk.uib.no)
Peter Graugaard (p.k.gravgaard@medisin.uio.no)
Hilde Grimstad (hilde.grimstad@medisin.ntnu.no)
Per Hjortdahl (per.hjortdahl@medisin.uio.no)
Are Holen (are.holen@medisin.ntnu.no)
Tone Nordoy (tone.nordoy@unn.no)
Helge Skirbekk (helge.skirbekk@medisin.uio.no)
Arnstein Finset (arnstein.finset@medisin.uio.no)

Version: 2 Date: 16 June 2007

Author's response to reviews: see over
Observed Communication Skills: How Do They Relate To The Consultation Content?

A nation-wide study of graduate medical students seeing a standardized patient for a first-time consultation in a general practice setting.

Cover letter to the Editor.

Reviewer Wilkerson:

- The concerns about concluding limitations with only one interviewed patient as assessment basis for observation of communication skills and the short time used for it (15 minutes as in an ordinary general practice consultation) is addressed in the introduction with references included and discussed later (Stillman’s 1991 is addressing the same issue as that one referred to by Petrusa).

- We have, therefore, modified our conclusions both in our introduction and in the discussion part.

- We have now extended the check for representativity of the final-year 111 students who participated in the observational study with the whole final-year cohort (N = 320) they were recruited from. No differences in gender and age were found. As reported in our first draft, the scores on self-assessed communication skills among the same 320 students in their 5\textsuperscript{th} year were similar to the scores among the 111 (of the 320) one year later when we carried out our observation study (page 5).

- We have tried to clarify even more the construction of the content indices and argued for not constructing them on the basis of a PCA (page 8).

- The MAAS items (nr. 6 and 9) used as a content index (Informing/planning) was dichotomized on their median in order to match the other indices based on dichotomized scores. Further, the construction of the possible eight combinations based on low/high counts on three of the four content indices (index two and three merged) is more clearly described.

- We have validated the ACIR scores against the MAAS scores and maintained the non-content partitioning by arguing for the way we selected the non-content items being consonant with the same procedure in another study (Aspegren, 2005). We have reported the internal consistency (.86) of the non-content mean (page 9).

- We have omitted the comparison between schools.

Reviewer BAN

- We have argued for both the reliability and the validity of ACIR (see above).