Author's response to reviews

Title: Oral Cancer Awareness of Undergraduate Medical and Dental Students

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Author's response to reviews: see over
Dear editor,

RE: MS 8193478814207154
Title: Oral cancer awareness of undergraduate medical and dental students
Lachlan M Carter and Graham R Ogden

We would like to thank the reviewers for their comments. We have tried to balance the differing requests of reviewer one and two as regards the length of the paper. Please find below the revisions made in light of their comments:

Reviewer 1

Major Compulsory Revisions

1. The test used to compare the age distribution of each group was the Wilcoxon rank-sum test and not the Wilcoxon signed-rank test. This has been reported as the “Wilcoxon sign rank sum test” in the manuscript for which we apologise. We have changed the manuscript and tables accordingly. The distribution of age amongst the medical and dental student groups was skewed; therefore a t-test was inappropriate so the Wilcoxon rank-sum test was used to compare the medians. The Wilcoxon rank-sum test was also used to compare the number of risk factors and oral changes identified by the medical and dental student groups. The data is continuous but was not normally distributed so a t-test was again considered not appropriate. The extended chi test comments on the mathematical process of generating the chi statistic when comparing more than a 2x2 table but is basically another version of the chi square test. We have changed the manuscript omitting the term “extended chi test”.

2. The first two sentences from the abstract conclusion have now been omitted.

Minor Essential Revisions

2. This study took place before the current legislation regarding ethical approval was in place. The purpose of the project and that the data would be used for research was explained to the students prior to completing the questionnaire although no consent forms were signed. The study was part of LC’s 4th year undergraduate medical research project, which all students at Dundee University Medical School are required to undertake. The projects are entered for the Ethicon prize which this project won and are presented publicly so that the students could attend and judge.

3. The word “less” has been replaced with “fewer” in the abstract and manuscript where appropriate.

4. We have not commented on incorrect risk factors or oral changes as none were reported. We would have been happy to analyse incorrect
responses but the poor quality of responses was perhaps the most striking finding.

5. We have changed the run-on sentence on page 4, paragraph 2 1st sentence from “General dental practitioner oral cancer awareness is well documented however, little is known about general medical practitioner oral cancer awareness in the United Kingdom” to “General dental practitioner oral cancer awareness is well documented. However little is known about general medical practitioner oral cancer awareness in the United Kingdom”.

Discretionary Revisions

6. We feel that the figures comparing the distribution of risk factors identified and oral changes identified between and amongst medical and dental students are integral to the paper. The figures show the range of risk factors and oral changes identified and allow a rapid visual comparison between the groups which would not be easily represented in the narrative.

7. The percentages have been rounded up thus removing decimal places where percentages are reported in the manuscript.

8. The length of the discussion or literature review has not been altered. Many medical educationalists may not be aware of the increasing incidence of oral cancer and thus a description of the incidence and previous work regarding oral cancer awareness of general medical practitioners was included. For this reason the importance of oral mucosal changes was also included in the discussion (which accords with referee 2’s request).

Reviewer 2

General

4. Other than dental graduates studying medicine for a career in Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery we are unaware of any unprompted requests for more information on oral cancer/oral health.

Minor Essential Revisions

1. The questionnaire was returned by all students attending the lectures at which it was delivered. There were between 40 to 50 dental students in each year at Dundee Dental School. Therefore almost all dental students returned a questionnaire. There were approximately 100 medical students in each year at Dundee Medical School. Access to fourth and fifth year medical students was difficult because the students are distributed throughout Scotland and England as part of their clinical training. Therefore there is only approximately one third to one half of the fourth and fifth year medical students in Dundee at any given time. These logistical difficulties meant that only 50 per cent
of the fourth and final year medical students completed questionnaires. This is a rather convoluted description of return rates so we did not include this in the discussion. In summary the questionnaire was returned by all accessible medical students in Dundee at the times of delivery.

2. IQ is the interquartile range. The tables have been amended to describe this.

3. We have amended the discussion to include discussion of changes in oral cancer awareness amongst the medical students in different years of training as suggested.

Discretionary Revisions

1. The important results regarding identifying alcohol as a risk factor and identifying erythroplakia and erythroleukoplakia as oral changes has now been identified within the abstract.

2. The discussion of the oral health curriculum at Dundee Medical School has been briefly expanded upon. We have also included a brief discussion regarding special study modules and electives in which such knowledge can be obtained.

3. We are grateful to referee 2 for drawing our attention to the two papers dealing with this topic in the States and have quoted one of these.

We very much hope that our paper will now be found acceptable for publication.

Yours sincerely

Lachlan Carter                                                    Graham Ogden