Author’s response to reviews

Title: Assessment of an Undergraduate Psychiatry Course in an African Setting

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Version: 3 Date: 7 April 2008

Author’s response to reviews: see over
To whom it may concern

**MS: 1048459025176459 - Assessment of an Undergraduate Psychiatry Course in an African Setting**

This letter contains a response to the reviewers’ points for the above manuscript. The revised manuscript will accompany this letter. Formatting changes have been made to the manuscript as requested.

This letter includes

i) Response to Reviewer 1

ii) Response to reviewer 2

Yours sincerely

Benjamin Baig
Reviewer 1

Pleased find below responses to Reviewer 1 comments. The corrections and responses from the authors are in bold

We thank the reviewer for his further comments

Reviewer's report:

Assessment of an undergraduate psychiatry course in an African setting
Authors: Benjamin J Baig et al
Reviewer: Adamson S. Muula

General comment

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to be part of the process of reviewing this manuscript. I am impressed with the changes the authors have been able to accommodate since I last read the manuscript. I believe now this manuscript may be accepted if the editor so decides. I recommend the manuscript for publication and I believe I do not need to see the manuscript again as these changes are minor.

Minor changes

I have two small changes I still suggest but could be taken or not, depending on the editor’s decision.

1. This is with regard to the authors' report of ethical review in Malawi. I am satisfy with the path that the authors took in seeking review and exemption from College of Medicine Research Ethics Committee’s Chairperson, Dr Eric Borgstein. He has authority to make the decision that was taken. However, I doubt that he needs to be specifically mentioned within the text. I would suggest something like, but not necessarily the same wording: “The study was exempted from full ethical review by the College of Medicine Research and Ethics Committee (COMREC) as this or it was review of ongoing program.” This I believe is adequate as Dr Borgstein was functioning as the relevant authority to grant such exemptions.

Changed:
The study was reviewed by College of Medicine Research and Ethics Committee (COMREC) and was approved. Professor Borgstein is the chair of the Committee. The wording of the paper will be changed to:

“The study was reviewed by College of Medicine Research and Ethics Committee (COMREC), University of Malawi and was approved”.

2. In paragraph three of the Discussion section, there is an 8, following the first sentence that is hanging. Is this a reference?

Deleted as above

Formatting
Also note that the authors have used different reference styles. I believe the formatting section of the journal will catch these little errors but correcting the formatting issues now facilitates rapid publication. Also note that in many areas, the references within text are inserted after a punctuation mark. BMC journals reference is like this [1]. And not like this. [1] And…
Also the referencing is like this:

References


And not like any of the following formats:

1. Broadhead RL and Muula AS Creating a medical school for Malawi: problems and achievements BMJ 2002;325;384-387
   Not as:
1. Broadhead RL and Muula AS Creating a medical school for Malawi: problems and achievements BMJ 2002;325;384-387
   Not as:
   Please note the positions of the year of publication, colon, coma, and no semi-colon in the correct version.
Thank you. Adamson Muula

Changed as requested
Reviewer 2

Please find responses to Reviewer 2 comments. Responses and corrected text are in bold.

We thank the reviewer for his further comments.

1. Major Compulsory Revisions

a. Ethics from Malawi. I am concerned about the idea of ethical approval being gained from an individual. If Professor E Borstein was acting for the College of Medicine, it should be stated clearly that ethical approval was gained from the college.

The study was reviewed by College of Medicine Research and Ethics Committee (COMREC) and was approved. Professor Borgstein is the chair of the Committee. The wording of the paper will be changed to:

“This study was reviewed by College of Medicine Research and Ethics Committee (COMREC), University of Malawi and was approved”.

b. Comparing Malawi students and Edinburgh students. Although the authors have accepted the significant disparity between the duration of contact of these students with teaching and learning of Psychiatry, they are still comparing their marks! For example, in the abstract, they said,

“This study aims to assess........
by comparing University of Malawi and Edinburgh University medical students’ performance on the same paper”.

Now changed to:

This study aimed to assess the effectiveness of an undergraduate psychiatry course given by UK psychiatrists in Malawi by studying University of Malawi and Edinburgh University medical students’ performance on an MCQ examination paper.
Also under results, they said “As can be seen from table 2, marks range from 67.5 – 89.4%. This is significantly higher than those of the Malawi group”.

This has been removed

It is fundamentally wrong to compare the scores from these two groups in anyway. Students use all their total educational experience to respond to any form of assessment. The argument that this is MCQ so it does not matter is not correct. The objectivity of MCQs is based on administering the same set of questions to students who have gone through similar educational experience. The attempt to explain away this fundamental methodological flaw in this write up in the discussion section does not suffice.

We agree with the reviewer that the Malawi and Edinburgh students are different in terms of:
1. Duration of contact in Psychiatry
2. Total educational experience
3. Experience with MCQs
4. Many known and unknown socio-demographic and educational variables

We feel that the paper has been revised and acknowledges these important facts.

We have removed the following from the abstract:

“Edinburgh students scored higher than Malawi students on the Malawi exam (p=0.04).”

We have modified the conclusion and discussion to highlight the reviewers’ points and have removed references to a comparison between Edinburgh and Malawi students throughout the paper. We do not believe in this instance that there is a “fundamental methodological flaw” in this paper.

c. Extrapolating the marks of the Malawi students to an Edinburgh University Marking system. This to me is Ok so long as it is made clear that this comparison is hypothetical and that the University marking system is based on a longer duration of Psychiatric training. Obviously, the Malawian students would most likely perform better on the University marking system if they had longer duration of training.
Changing to:

Abstract

Importantly 84.4% of Malawi students scored above 60% on their exam which would equate to a hypothetical pass by UK university standards.

Discussion

The use of 5 clinician/academics from the UK to support a two week project leading to a hypothetical 84.4% exam pass rate can be seen as an example of justifiable use of resources for a measurable conclusion.

d. I do not see how the authors will avoid this fundamental methodological flaw without removing the Edinburgh students from the equation. Removing these students does not remove any thing from this paper, which to me shows that a 2 weeks psychiatry course in a developing country is useful in rapidly bringing knowledge level of medical students to a UK standard using assessment tools based on Edinburgh University system.

The inclusion of the Edinburgh students is only fundamental to this study as they have performed both the Malawi and the Edinburgh MCQ exams. This demonstrates that Malawi exam is of a similar standard to that in Edinburgh and as a consequence the teaching course brings students to a certain educational standard. As the reviewer has suggested we will remove the direct comparison between the Edinburgh and Malawi students in both the abstract and the results.

We hope these changes have been satisfactory.