Author's response to reviews

Title: The influence of regional branch campuses on medical students' choice of specialty and practice location: a historical cohort study

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Author's response to reviews: see over
Dear Dr. Norton:

I am submitting a revised manuscript entitled, “The Influence of Regional Basic Science Campuses on Medical Students’ Choice of Specialty and Practice Location: A Historical Cohort Study” by Brokaw et al.

We appreciate the reviewers’ thoughtful comments and have incorporated most of their suggestions. I have outlined below a point-by-point response to the reviewer’s comments, and explained how the paper has been modified in accordance with the reviewers’ concerns.

**Emphasis on Basic Science Training Sites**

Three of the reviewers (RS, SS, AB) commented that the novel aspect of this study—the influence of *preclinical* training sites—should be better emphasized. Accordingly, we have modified the paper to make this clearer to the reader:

- Title: modified to include the phrase “regional basic science campuses”
- Abstract: modified first sentence and last sentence
- Background: page 4, paragraph 2, lines 9-11; page 5, paragraph 2, lines 6-10
- Discussion: page 15, paragraph 1, lines 1, 12-14; page 16, paragraph 3, lines 3-4
- Conclusions: page 22, paragraph 1, lines 1 and 3

**Description of the IUSM Campus Regions**

Three of the reviewers (RS, SS, AB) thought that a brief description of the IUSM regions would be helpful to international readers. We agree but feel the Background section is not the best place for such information. We believe its placement in the Background would be a distraction for most readers and would disrupt the flow of our presentation. Instead, we have included a separate section in the Methods called “campus locations” that describes the statewide system and provides key socio-demographic features of the communities containing IUSM campuses (page 6, paragraph 2). We have also followed the excellent suggestion of TSG and included a map of the IUSM system (Figure 1). This new section, coupled with the information already present about the campus regions (page 9, paragraph 1), should provide the international reader with a sound understanding of the socio-demographics of Indiana.

**Number of Students Assigned to IUSM Campuses**

Two of the reviewers (SS, AB) requested information about the specific number of students assigned to each campus. This has been included in the Methods (page 8, paragraph 2).
Reference to the WWAMI Program
Two of the reviewers (RS, SS) indicated that a reference to the WWAMI program should be included. From the published literature (Acad Med 2001, 76: 765-775; Acad Med 2006, 81: 857-862), there appears to be little hard data about the efficacy of the WWAMI program, other than above average rates of return to the graduates’ home states. We have included a brief description of the WWAMI program in the Discussion (page 17, paragraph 2) and provided a published reference (#21).

Early Clinical Experiences
Two of the reviewers (RS, SS) noted the importance of early clinical experiences at the regional campuses and suggested that more should be learned about these experiences. We wholeheartedly agree. In fact, such a study would be our next logical step to understand the “cause” of the observed regional campus effect. We emphasize this in the Discussion on page 18, paragraph 1, lines 15-16, and again in the study limitations section on page 21, paragraph 2.

Other Issues
Reviewer SS:
- We respectfully disagree with the reviewer’s statement that “little new information nor recommendations are made to persuade the reader to make any changes to their own program based on this study.” We had a clearly stated hypothesis; namely, that training at regional basic science campuses influences IUSM students to pursue primary care careers near the regional campuses they attended. And our results supported this hypothesis. The reason we used the same variables as other studies of student career decisions was to control for their confounding influence, and thereby reveal an independent effect of preclinical training site. This is explained several places in the paper, including but not limited to page 11, paragraph 1, lines 3-6, and page 16, paragraph 3, lines 1-3. Our findings are novel because, as far as we are aware, no other study has systematically analyzed the role of preclinical training site on career outcomes. We believe our Conclusions on page 22 are consistent with our findings and present the reader with new information to inform decision-making. Therefore, we do not feel that further explanation is warranted, but if the Editor believes that specific additions can improve the paper, we could be happy to consider them.
- The question about career alternatives to family medicine in Terre Haute is unclear to us. This seems rather open-ended, so we cannot respond without further guidance. However, we believe that sufficient information is provided about the regional campuses to enable the reader to properly interpret our study and assess its implications.
- The reviewer specifically asked why Bloomington is so different as a first-choice campus assignment. We have provided an answer on page 8, paragraph 1, lines 1-2.
- The reviewer requested additional information about the campus assignment process. We have included a bit more information on page 7, paragraph 1, lines 7-9. The “campus assignment” section covers the School’s process for assigning students. The important fact to keep in mind is that the assignment is not random, but tries to accommodate the students’ preferences as much as possible. However, many more students want to attend Indianapolis than space allows, so the School has to limit the circumstances in which it will grant a first-choice assignment to Indianapolis. The special circumstances listed in this section are the only ones routinely considered when placing students in Indianapolis (i.e., early decision applicants, married students, and home owners). Because so few
students want to attend a regional campus, those that do are almost always granted their first-choice, regardless of their reasons.

Reviewer AB:
- The total number of students at the regional campuses and Indianapolis has been added to the top of Table 1.

Reviewer TSG:
- MCAT has been spelled out on page 2.
- According to the *American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*, there are two spelling variants: ‘practice’ or ‘practise’. Either spelling can be used for the noun or verb. The spelling with a ‘s’ is the British variant. We prefer ‘practice’, but if the Editor feels otherwise, we will be happy to change the text accordingly.
- We have clarified in the Methods why out-of-state graduates were excluded from the analysis (page 11, paragraph 3, line 1-2). The analysis of career choice included all graduates (page 11, paragraph 2, lines 1-2).

We hope the paper has now been suitably revised to publish. Please contact me if you require further changes.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

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