Author's response to reviews

Title: Inter-rater agreement in the scoring of abstracts submitted to a primary care research conference

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Thank you for reviewing our paper and giving us the opportunity to resubmit. I have addressed each of the referee's comments as follows:

Reviewer: Susan van Rooyen
General comments requiring compulsory revision:
1. Limitations of the study are now addressed in the Discussion, along with suggestions for further research.

Specific comments requiring compulsory revision:
1. The word 'conference' has been added to the title.

2. (a) This has been changed to read 'mean total scores'.
(b) Originality and importance were selected as examples of the four subjective components of the structured assessment. This has now been clarified.
(c) Both points have now been addressed.

3. An explanation of what ICCs are and why they are appropriate for this analysis is now presented. The figure has been removed. The process of selection of abstracts for the meeting has also been added.

4. We regarded items 1, 2, 6 and 7 of the structured assessment as 'subjective' and items 3-5 as relating to study design. This has now been clarified in the Results section paragraph 1. We have added a table with summary statistics of accepted and rejected abstracts.

5. (a) By using 'were' in Discussion paragraph 1 line 2, the purpose of this paragraph is simply to summarise the findings of our study. We have not made any attempt to generalise and thus feel that the referee's point is not correct. However we accept that the generalisability of our study does need more discussion and have discussed both the limitations of the study and the findings in context of previous research.
   (b) We have been more guarded in our interpretation of the findings and have expanded on why subjective components may reflect a reviewer's own research interests.

6. A conclusions paragraph has been added.

Discretionary revisions:
1. The process of selecting abstracts for the meeting has been clarified in the methods section. By rank
ordering abstracts and accepting the top 45, a statistical comparison of accepted and rejected abstracts would not have been meaningful. The overlap between accepted and rejected abstracts scores of the two author-referees reflects the fact that acceptance was based on aggregation with referees from other institutions' scores. This has now been clarified in the discussion.

2. I think that the referee's experience of 'hawks' and 'doves' refers precisely to our point about subjectivity. That is, that when an instrument like this asks for assessment of aspects such as importance of the topic or originality of the study, there is considerable potential for scores to simply reflect a reviewer's own opinions. We feel that this potential is lessened when a reviewer is asked to rate aspects of a study's design or execution and this is supported by our data.

Reviewer: Liz Wager
Compulsory revisions:
1. Title: See point 1 above.

2. Table: See point 3 above.

Discretionary revisions:
1. Results: Table 2 now contains this information.

2. Figure: The figure has been removed.

3. Discussion: We are grateful to the referee for drawing our attention to these other references and the discussion has been broadened accordingly.

4. Conclusions: A conclusions paragraph has been added.

The referees' comments have been very useful in improving the quality of the paper. I hope that I have addressed all the points satisfactorily and look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

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Lecturer