Author’s response to reviews

Title: Enhanced hospital-based learning at a medical school through application of management principles - a case study

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Version: 1 Date: 26 Jun 2017

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BMC Medical Education
Editorial Office

Dear editor,

Thank you for giving us the opportunity to revise the paper MEED-D-16-00620 “Application of management principles enhanced hospital-based learning at a medical school – a case study”

We are grateful for the professional reviewing of our manuscript. Below you will find point-by-point responses to the comments stated by the editor and the reviewers, and performed changes indicated with track changes in the attached version of the manuscript. We really think that the manuscript has improved by the valuable suggestions from the reviewers.

The revised manuscript has been seen and approved by all authors and all authors have taken due care to insure the integrity of the work. We do sincerely hope that you find the paper suitable for publication in Advances in Health Science Education.
Sincerely Yours,

Anna Kiessling, on behalf of all authors

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Editor Comments:

To begin with the introduction is too lengthy and misses a clear storyline/structure. It is confusing and lacks coherence. The main purpose of the paper becomes clear at the tail end (last paragraph) of the introduction.

Answer: We have rewritten and shortened the introduction to create a clear storyline, see track changes in the revised manuscript Background section.

The methods and in particular the results need to be revised so that it is easy for the reader to comprehend and identify the various steps of the educational approach. Attention should be given to language and I would strongly suggest a professional proofreader also go through the revised version of this manuscript.

Answer: We have clarified the various steps in the intervention to reorganise the course. A native English speaking person have read the revised version of the manuscript

Reviewer reports:

Mohammad Jalili (Reviewer 1): I read the manuscript with great interest and would like to thank the editor for giving me this opportunity to review this paper.
This is a not-blinded review, but I do not know the authors in person and I have no conflicts of interest in doing the review.

This splendid report describes a joint collaboration for improving the learning environment for medical students in the context of healthcare facilities.

The authors tackle an important problem and try to solve it using a new approach and applying management principles. They have also tried to evaluate the impact of this approach from different perspectives. The manuscript is well written but there are a few issues I'd like to raise:

1. The main point is that the intervention is not clearly described. Examples have been provided and some highlights of the approach have been mentioned. But to be reproducible more need to be said about the details of the intervention.

Answer: We have now included more details on the intervention in the result section. See page 11 to 12, section: Process of the educational intervention.

2. Introduction of the paper is unnecessarily too long.

Answer: As stated above the Background section is now shortened

3. Some prepositions maintained by the authors are unsupported by references (e.g. page4, line 57-9)

Answer: Some of these prepositions are now excluded to shorten the introduction and for others we have clarified that they are based on our observations (see track changes in the background section.

4. Language editing is needed especially in the first section of the paper.

Answer: A native English speaking person have helped us with language editing
Brian Mavis (Reviewer 2):

This paper describes an intervention based on management principles to realign the educational mission and enhance the learning environment of a community teaching hospital. It is written as a case study and documents the problem to be solved, the steps taken, preliminary outcomes and lessons learned. Generally the authors use the case study format successfully. There are a number of places where the explanations are not clear or need to be expanded to help the reader understand the approach taken by the authors.

Some specific suggestions are provided below:

1. The overall logic and organization of the Background section is challenging to a reader unfamiliar with this case. It is difficult to follow. I would suggest that the authors carefully review the sequence of information presented as well as the transitions from one main idea to the next. The use of subheadings would help the reader follow the flow of the story as it unfolds. In addition, the Background section is long and redundant in places. For instance, much of the Background provides general principles, some of which are repeated again on p. 7 when the specific hospital at the center of this case study is described. Overall, in the Background section, the delineation of the key principles and the organization of ideas to be presented need attention.

Answer: Thank you for this comment and as stated above the introduction is rewritten and shortened and reorganised to make it easier to follow.

2. In the Background, the authors write, "...clinical education has not always (been the) highest priority ..." p. 4 (line 11), which implies that education has been the highest priority at one time or another. In contrast, on p. 5 (Line 36) they write "The dominating mission of a hospital is indisputably to provide high quality care of patients." This latter is true and seems inconsistent with the prior statement on p. 4. I suggest rewording the statement on p. 4 for consistency and accuracy.

Answer: We have now reworded the first statement, see page 4, paragraph 1, line 3-4.
3. IN the Background (pp. 4-5, lines 52-60 and 1-3) the authors make the gap between learning and supervision, however no references are provided to support their statements.

Answer: This part is rewritten

4. On p. 6 (lines 53-59) the authors write that government funds are made available to university departments. Is it true that the government funds departments directly? In many cases, the government funds the university, which then directs funds to specific departments. As written it seems misleading.

Answer: Thank you for noticing this misleading sentence. It is now rewritten.

5. There are no references to any of the statements made on p. 7. If these statements are based on the authors' observations, then they should be explicitly labeled as such; otherwise they should be referenced to the literature.

Answer: The statements are based on own observations, which is now clarified.

6. I would suggest that the authors move the Study Aim statements to the end of the Background, and revise the study aims for clarity to guide the reader. The aims should be written as complete sentences.

Answer: We have clarified the aim and moved it to the end of the Background section.

7. One step that is not clear in this manuscript is how the decision to use management principles came about. Were other approaches tried and unsuccessful, did the people involved have backgrounds in management so this would have been the approach with which they were most familiar, or were there characteristics of the situation such that a management approach seemed the most appropriate among the alternatives considered?
Answer: Traditional approaches aiming to improve quality had been tried without any substantial effect. Further one of the course directors had a background in management and as CEO of a health care department. See page 12, paragraph 2 starting with: To conclude, the benchmarking showed substantial differences between the teaching hospitals.…

8. On p. 12 the authors describe the results of "the first step" and conclude that benchmarking did not result in any clarifications related to financial resources (lines 9-12). In the next sentence (lines 14-22) the authors indicate that benchmarking was used as one of several strategies for an analysis of financial resources, which resulted in modeling. This seems to be a successful use of modeling to provide clarity around financial resources, and therefore contradicts the first statement. Perhaps the authors were trying to make a different point, but as written this is not clear to the reader.

Answer: The sentence about the results of the benchmarking have been clarified and no longer contradicts the second sentence: “the benchmarking showed substantial differences between the teaching hospitals concerning financial allocation of teaching resources and costs at department level.” see page 12, paragraph 2.

9. The discussion of the use of benchmarking was not found to be useful due to the distinctiveness of the case and comparison hospitals. On page 13, there is discussion of the reorganization of the course to improve outcomes. It would be helpful to how the realignment compared to the other hospitals: were the results a model unique to the hospital or do the changes reflect a convergence of the course to a model common to the teaching hospitals?

Answer: The collaboration between the teaching hospitals was weak during the study period. This together with identified differences in prerequisites and management made it impossible to perform a joint reorganisation in all hospitals. The model described was unique to the studied hospital. See page 12, paragraph 2.

10. The graphs need clear labeling. There is no label on the y-axis of either graph. For Figure 1, there is no labels provided in the legend to explain the meaning of 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5.

Answer: Labels are now added and the figure legend to figure 1 is clarified.