Author’s response to reviews

Title: Voluntary vs. Compulsory Student Evaluation of Clerkships: Effect on Validity and Potential Bias

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Dear Dr. Raupach and Distinguished Reviewers:

We would like to thank you for considering our manuscript for publication at BMC Medical Education. We clarified the request below and in the manuscript, under Methods section. We hope we were able to address the raised concern.

Sincerely,

Sola Aoun Bahous, MD, PhD, MHPE
Editor's Comment

Please clarify a discrepancy that may be due to a misunderstanding (even so it should be resolved). In your reply to the reviewers, you state that “We agree with the reviewer's observation that in the voluntary cohort, respondents and non-respondents in one clerkship may be different from those in another clerkship, and that reporting consistency of response status is very interesting. This analysis was done and yielded a Cronbach’s Alpha of 0.84, which is consistent with the fact that respondents tend to be consistent across clerkships, and vice versa.” This indicates that you were able to match student entries across clerkships. However, a little bit further down you state “To link different responses of the same student, we need to identify the individuals. However, one of the issues involved in this problem is that our respondent identities are anonymous”. To me, this looks rather contradictory. Please revise the methods section so that all readers will be able to tell how you were able to discern responders and non-responders across clerkships although the data did not contain identifier codes.

Response: We agree with you that the writing may confuse the readers, especially that we did not clarify where and to whom student identifiers were not available. To clarify, all clerkship evaluations are managed at the Dean’s Office. The software generates a report that includes aggregate information about each clerkship without any link of student name to his/her evaluation (the evaluation form does not include any student identifier). However, the software identifies respondents and non-respondents. Therefore, the administrator at the Dean’s Office in charge of clerkship evaluations knows which students completed the assignment (evaluation) and those who did not, within and across clerkships. For example, they know that Sola Aoun Bahous, Angelique Salloum and Ara Tekian were responders in all clerkships while Pascale Salameh, Yoon Soo Park and Wael Salameh did not complete any evaluation. The administrator then de-identifies the data and sends us only codes (student 1, student 2, etc.) and response status for each student (respondent vs. non-respondent), in addition to aggregate characteristics of students per clerkship. To make this clearer, we adjusted the database paragraph of the Methods section. We hope it is now clearer to the readership.