Author’s response to reviews

Title: Peers as OSCE assessors for junior medical students – a review of routine use: A mixed methods study

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Author’s response to reviews:

Dear Dr Menard, dear colleague!

in regard to your e-mail response (Nov 1st 2019) we are grateful to learn that our manuscript is potentially acceptable for publication in BMC Medical Education, once we have carried out the essential revisions of the section editor. We highly appreciate your efforts to ensure an accelerated process, thank you very much indeed!

Thank you very much for your review and the helpful and concrete proposals. We have included all of the editor’s comments and have changed the manuscript. The revised manuscript, with track changes and as a clean document, has been uploaded together with this response. We cordially hope to fulfill your requirements and are very much looking forward hearing from you.

With kind regards and best wishes from Heidelberg,

Yours sincerely,
Simon Schwill
n.n. (section editor)

I would still quibble that peer tutors rarely act as assessors in an OSCE.

Thank you for the effort to review the manuscript. We agree that there is quiet a few reports on peer-students acting as OSCE-assessors on conferences and meetings. Literature review on pubmed.com uncovers the following results (Not 7th 2019):

1. “OSCE” AND “peer-assessor” – no results

2. ”OSCE” and ”peer-assessment” – 13 results

3. “OSCE” AND “assessment” AND “peer” – 51 results

Majority of these 51 studies is not about medical students. Khan et al presented a review on this question in 2017 and identified (all studies until Feb 2016): “Eight studies had senior medical students assessing their junior peers (Harris & Miller 1990; Davis Feickert et al. 1992; Reiter et al. 2004; Chenot et al. 2007; Moineau et al. 2011; Burgess et al. 2013; Young et al. 2014; Iblher et al. 2015).” Of these, 7 use formative OSCEs. Since 2017 few studies were added and of these only a handful describes peers as OSCE-assessors. To the best of our knowledge, there are hardly 10 studies about peer-assessors in a formative OSCE and thereby seems to be a lack of publications on this topic.

In respect to your experience and to be clear and precise (peer assessment in the formative OSCE) we have changed the background section on page 4.

Anamnesis is not a commonly used word and I'd suggest they change it

Thank you very much for your offer to improve the manuscript. We have changed the term anamnesis into history-taking all over the manuscript.

I don't think they've quite acknowledged enough that some of the reactions are because the OSCE is formative, not just because of peer assessors - it's added in one sentence in the limitations, but I'd like to see that acknowledged just a bit more.

As suggested, we have changed the manuscript and pointed out that the OSCE is formative in the very beginning (p 15) and the very end (p 17) of the discussion additionally to an extended discussion in the limitation section (p17). Furthermore we have added a call on further studies to prove this postulated effect (abstract, P17).

The main thing is the theory/conceptual framework is weak. The research question is therefore quite general. They explain the questionnaire was based on comprehensive literature analysis but don't tell us anything more than that - I think that fits with that lack of a conceptual framework. likewise it means the discussion is a bit descriptive rather than synthesis - it wasn't too clear to
me from the discussion what we've learnt that we didn't already know. I'm sure there are things but they haven't made them easy to find.

Thank you very much for these comments. We see your point. To the best of our knowledge this is the first study to report on broad implementation of a formative OSCE with peer-assessors in the area of medical education. We have more than 5 years of experience and more than 1500 medical students have passed the formative peer-led OSCE within the last five years. We have indicated that implementation is feasible and that from learner’s perspective peer-assessors are favorable within the first OSCE. The studies available mainly focus on the reliability of peers as assessors whereas in our study we indicate the broad value added for the students.

As you have suggested we have worked on the discussion to make the synthesis stronger (p15-17). Due to the exploratory character of the qualitative data of our study, we have alleviated the conclusion (P2, p 17). Furthermore we have been more precise that our self-invented tool aimed to learn about the beneficial effects from the student’s point of view (p. 8). Finally, we have pointed out that the qualitative data is a reasonable but unproven point of view of the learners (which has not yet been addressed though) both in the discussion and within the abstract (p2, 17) and added another, opposing reference (ref 39). We thereby hope to meet your concern.

they’re equated quality with inter-rater reliability - I’d suggest quality is broader than that
We are sorry to be imprecise on that and agree with your comment. We have included your suggestion and changed the manuscript in the discussion on page 16 of the manuscript.

Thank you very much for your help!