Author’s response to reviews

Title: Does growing up with a physician influence the ethics of medical students' relationships with the pharmaceutical industry? The cases of the US and Poland.

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Author’s response to reviews:

Thank you for the reviews of my article ‘Does growing up with a physician influence the ethics of medical students’ relationships with the pharmaceutical industry? The cases of the US and Poland’. My answers to the comments are below.

REVIEWER 1:

General

1. The research question, although not well articulated, is sound and the methods appear to be sound although I am not qualified to assess the statistics used.

Answer: The research question has been rephrased: ‘How does growing up with a physician influence medical students' perceptions of conflicts of interest in their relationships with industry?’ p.2

2. The paper would benefit from inclusion in the discussion and/or introduction of contextual information regarding medical school curricula and norms regarding what types of relationships with pharma are acceptable (gifts, reps, information).

Answer: I have now included this information p.4.

3. It should also include an outline of related laws/rules/guidelines in the respective countries, or statements of their absence

Answer: I have added this information to the discussion p.13-14.
The results regarding trust in the pharmaceutical industry (Table 3) are confusing because of the negative and positive language used in the survey and discussion (yes/no etc). This undermines the interpretation of the results in the discussion and abstract: that in Poland, medical schools are more trusting of and engaged with pharma than those in the USA.

Answer: I have changed the tables to give greater clarity. I have explained my thesis better p.12-13.

Abstract

1. 'Occupational ethics' needs to be rephrased - it is not a term usually discussed in medical or bioethics or even in medicine.

Answer: I have changed this to “professional ethics” p.2.

2. The research question should be stated or paraphrased here

Answer: I have added a new sentence: The present paper sought to answer the research question ‘How does growing up with a physician influence medical students' perceptions of conflicts of interest in their relationships with industry?’ p.2.

3. Why the survey was conducted and why it compares Poland with Pennsylvania (PA) and the wider USA.

Answer: Thank you for this remark. I have now explained that medical schools in these two cities were chosen because they are both university cities with similar population sizes, although, as now mentioned in the methods section, unfortunately funding constraints precluded more widely ranging data collection in the two countries involved p.2 and p. 7.

4. The word 'cooperation' in 'cooperation with the pharmaceutical industry' is not clear and needs explanation or replacement in this context.

Answer: This word has been changed to “relationship” p. 2.

Text

1. Explain and defend how "All of this influenced politics in medical schools" and
2. define 'university based political organizations' pg 5 line 12-14 and

Answer: This has been changed to: “universities do not have conflict of interest polices, and there is a lack of training in educational programs to defend against the influence of pharmaceutical companies [7].” p. 4

3. 'medical student cooperation' Pg 5 line 44

Answer: This has been changed to: “Medical student cooperation with the pharmaceutical industry, such as attending industry-sponsored conferences, meeting PSRs, accepting gifts, etc., is dangerous for many reasons.” p. 5.

4. Replace the phrase 'medics' which is not used to describe doctors in the USA pg 6 line 22

Answer: This has been changed to: ‘doctors’ p. 5.

5. Specify the research question earlier, and maybe restructure it around conflicts of interest and/or differences between Poland and PA (How does growing up with a physician influence medical students' relationships with the pharmaceutical industry?),

Answer: The research question has been changed to: “How does growing up with a physician influence medical students' perceptions of conflicts of interest in their relationships with industry?” p. 6.

6. and clarify whether PA adequately reflects medicine in the USA

Answer: Of course PA alone may not give an adequate reflection of medicine in the US. In the Methods section I have mentioned that “the study was limited in that funding constraints precluded more widely ranging data collection in the two countries involved, and therefore the present findings may not be fully representative of the perceptions of all Polish or US medical students. Nevertheless, for reasons of brevity, in the text below the terms Polish and US are used to refer to students participating in the present survey.” p. 7
7. Typo: Polish not polish - Pg 10 Line 2
Answer: Corrected

8. If they are the same, don't repeat the survey questions - Pg 10 last paragraph
Answer: This has been changed to: “The index of physicians’ rights was based on the same five items for both countries” p.10.
Sentences were different from previous section, but the same for both countries.

9. Briefly describe existing legal and institutional rights of doctors to accept gifts from pharma (eg are students correct in their survey answers about existing rights?) Pg 11 table 2
Answer: I have described the rights of doctors p. 13-14 and students p.4.
I have not mentioned whether or not students were correct in my survey because this would require another page and table to give an adequate description.

10. A more useful question is whether its an important function that isn't otherwise met Pg 12 line 5 - if it isn't otherwise being met, then mention that in the text
Answer: Unfortunately, I could not understand the meaning of this comment. I would be happy to revise this part of the article upon clarification of the reviewer’s meaning.

11. Interpretation of Table 3 is questionable due to the polarized language used (no/yes and trust/distrust); need to change the language used in the Table and/or better explain it in the text Pg12 table 3
Answer: All tables have been changed to make for easier understanding.

12. OTC - spell out in full Pg 14 line 14
Answer: I have done this.
13. Existing guidelines/laws/curricular trends in both countries need to be introduced earlier and discussed in light of the study rationale Pg 14 line 22-30

Answer: This has now been done in the introduction p. 4 and in the discussion p. 13-15.

14. Its not clear that the data supports this statement and explanation: "Polish students were more suspicious than those in the US. This can be explained by the crisis of trust that is apparent in many post-communist countries" Pg 15 and See note above re table 3

Answer: Thank you for this remark. I agree that this was unclear. I have added a statistical test to confirm the statement about the lower level of trust in Polish students with respect to the pharmaceutical industry. p.12-13. I have not explained why people in post-communist countries are more distrustful (but there is a research reference provided which confirms this mentioned in discussion [27] p.16)

15. The topics addressed in the conclusion should be raised earlier and discussed with the study rationale.

Answer: I have done this in the discussion p.13-16.

16. The paper should also specify how training in conflicts of interest differs from curricular change; and frame curricula and policy suggestions by outlining those that exist and how they differ in Poland and PA

Answer: I added this to the discussion p.15.

REVIEWER 2:

1. I suggest you clarify the Tables in the article, as they are somewhat confusing. What do the percentages in the shaded boxes refer to? They are headed 'total', but this is unclear. How do they related to the percentages in the other columns? I suggest you clarify by giving a fuller heading to the shaded column.

Answer: All tables have been changed and are now clearer.
2. Do you think your findings are relevant more widely than simply to the USA and Poland? I suggest you add a sentence or two about how your research might be extended to other countries, and also speculate about what other ethical aspects among medical students might be researched using comparisons between those whose relatives are or are not doctors.

Answer: I have added material relating to this point to the discussion section p.16.

I hope that these changes are acceptable. If you have any further comments I would be happy to address them.