

Impact of a Communication Skills training course on performance in high stakes Membership Communication OSCE Station

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Abstract

Aims

To assess the impact of a non-commercial communication-skills training course for paediatric Membership on candidate performance in the MRCPCH clinical exam, specifically within the communication skills stations.

Methods

A one-day communication skills training course was designed for paediatric doctors in training preparing for the MRCPCH clinical exam. Two college examiners, a senior paediatric trainee and a communications consultant formed the faculty alongside two professional role players. Performance data was obtained from RCPCCH and comparisons of candidate performance were made before and after the course in the communication stations and in the exam as a whole. A preliminary test for the equality of variances indicated that the variances of the two groups were significantly different $F=1.65$, $p=0.03$. Therefore, a two-sample t-test was performed that does not assume equal variances.

Results

The course has been run on 5 occasions, attended by 47 trainees. 44 (94%) went on to attempt the MRCPCH exam. In total 29 (66%) of candidates who have attended the course passed the exam at the next or a subsequent sitting. The national average pass rate for the exam over the same period was 50%.

Comparisons of the 2 communication stations scores were made pre and post course. In total there were 45 candidate-attempts before the course and 60 after. Descriptive statistics are shown in table 1. The mode score increased across the attempts from 4 (clear fail) and 8 (bare fail) in the 2 communication stations pre course, to 12 (clear pass) in both stations post course. Using the two-

sample t-test for unequal variances there was a significant difference between the mean scores, $t(9) = -4.04$, $p = 0.000114$.

Conclusion

There were more passes in the communication stations of the MRCPCH exam following attendance on this communication skills training course. There was also a better pass rate in the exam overall in this cohort. Candidates preparing for the MRCPCH exam should be encouraged to attend such a course, particularly if they have performed poorly in the communication skills stations at previous unsuccessful attempts at the exam.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics for attempts in the Communications Stations pre and post the communication course

Station	Pre course		Post course	
	Comms A	Comms B	Comms A	Comms B
n	45	45	60	60
Mean	7.78	8.62	9.73	9.90
Standard Error	0.45	0.39	0.34	0.27
Median	8	8	10	10
Mode	4	8	12	12
Standard Deviation	2.99	2.62	2.67	2.13
Minimum score	4	4	4	4
Maximum score	12	12	12	12
Confidence Level (95.0%)	0.90	0.79	0.69	0.55

Given the non-linear nature of the marking system, the data is not ordinal so mean values are purely for a guide and do not translate to grades given, hence reporting of the mode i.e. the most frequently awarded grade