

A Response to “Changing Student Perception of an Online Integrated Structured Clinical Examination During the COVID-19 Pandemic” [Letter]

Stephen Chu 
Samuel Hale

GKT School of Medical Education,
London, SE1 1UL, UK

Dear editor

It is with interest that we read the article by Ganesanathan et al regarding the perception of online integrated structured clinical examinations among students.¹ The authors highlighted the benefits of using online examinations given the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and how peer-led mocks can improve confidence in these assessments. As final-year medical students, we took interest in the similarities and differences we have experienced the last year and would like to offer our perspectives.

Peer-led teaching and mock examinations offer a huge benefit to medical education, often filling gaps that formal teaching does not cover. In addition to familiarisation and practice with new material, they are a good opportunity for feedback and improvement. Our experience of similar schemes at our medical school are similarly positive, but the low-stakes results in more generous feedback when compared to high-stakes summative examinations where you are competitively marked against your peers. Consequently, we found that the metrics used in the study, did not include other commonly cited factors that affect the confidence in online summative examinations, such as the risk and ease of cheating compared to in-person examinations.^{2,3} It would have been interesting to read about the cohort's confidence with online examinations regarding these factors, as well as a comparison of attitudes after the official examinations and polling the remaining 58.4% of the cohort that did not respond.

While online exams may have been a necessity earlier into the pandemic, the lack of in-person finals examinations for students who graduated in 2020 has been cited to impact preparedness for starting their first year of foundation training as online examinations do not allow for proper assessment of practical skills that are essential in medicine.⁴ At our institution, the 2021 cohort were due to sit finals before the second wave of COVID-19 in the UK. Alternatives such as adapted objective structured clinical examinations (OSCEs) or an online OSCE were suggested. Ultimately, finalists were assessed by a “Clinical Workplace Examination” in both community GP and hospital settings. Students were assigned one patient and one examiner in either setting to take a full history, perform any/all necessary

Correspondence: Stephen Chu
GKT School of Medical Education,
Hodgkin Building, Newcomen Street,
London, SE1 1UL, UK
Email stephen.chu@kcl.ac.uk

examinations the student deemed fit over 20–30 minutes, followed a 10–15 minute discussion with the examiner regarding diagnosis and management. Both third and fourth years had modified OSCEs later in the year, with three days of three station circuits wearing full PPE rather than two days of seven stations. These modifications allowed us to maintain benefits of in-person assessments, while maintaining a high degree of safety for simulated patients, staff, and students alike.

In conclusion, Ganesanathan et al show that peer-led mocks can help to improve confidence in online OSCEs among students engaged with academic extracurriculars. However, it would be of benefit to have included a broader spectrum of students within their cohort, included a wider breadth of questions regarding confidence in online examinations, and polled questionees after their formal examinations. Or in light of in-person alternatives, students' thoughts on these versus online OSCEs as adjuncts to existing assessments.

Disclosure

The authors report no conflicts of interest in this communication.

References

1. Ganesanathan S, Li C, Donnir A, et al. Changing student perception of an online integrated structured clinical examination during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Adv Med Educ Pract.* 2021;12:887–894. doi:10.2147/AMEP.S325364
2. Elsalem L, Al-Azzam N, Jum'ah AA, Obeidat N, Sindiani AM, Kheirallah KA. Stress and behavioral changes with remote E-exams during the Covid-19 pandemic: a cross-sectional study among undergraduates of medical sciences. *Ann Med Surg.* 2020;60:271–279. doi:10.1016/j.amsu.2020.10.058
3. Khalaf K, El-Kishawi M, Moufti MA, Al Kawas S. Introducing a comprehensive high-stake online exam to final-year dental students during the COVID-19 pandemic and evaluation of its effectiveness. *Med Educ Online.* 2020;25(1):1826861. doi:10.1080/10872981.2020.1826861
4. Choi B, Jegatheeswaran L, Minocha A, Alhilani M, Nakhoul M, Mutengesa E. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on final year medical students in the United Kingdom: a national survey. *BMC Med Educ.* 2020;20(1):206. doi:10.1186/s12909-020-02117-1

Dove Medical Press encourages responsible, free and frank academic debate. The content of the *Advances in Medical Education and Practice* 'letters to the editor' section does not necessarily represent the views of Dove Medical Press, its officers, agents, employees, related entities or the *Advances in Medical Education and Practice* editors. While all reasonable steps have been taken to confirm the content of each letter, Dove Medical Press accepts no liability in respect of the content of any letter, nor is it responsible for the content and accuracy of any letter to the editor.

Advances in Medical Education and Practice

Dovepress

Publish your work in this journal

Advances in Medical Education and Practice is an international, peer-reviewed, open access journal that aims to present and publish research on Medical Education covering medical, dental, nursing and allied health care professional education. The journal covers undergraduate education, postgraduate training and continuing medical education

including emerging trends and innovative models linking education, research, and health care services. The manuscript management system is completely online and includes a very quick and fair peer-review system. Visit <http://www.dovepress.com/testimonials.php> to read real quotes from published authors.

Submit your manuscript here: <http://www.dovepress.com/advances-in-medical-education-and-practice-journal>

<https://doi.org/10.2147/AMEP.S336169>