

Teaching audit — lessons from summative assessment

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SUMMARY

In 1995 and 1996, 9% of registrars in the West of Scotland failed to demonstrate minimum competence in their audit project for summative assessment. Adverse trainer advice was implicated. This study set out to assess trainers' and registrars' confidence with audit teaching, the methods of teaching audit, and the perceived needs of both groups.

Keywords: Scotland; audit; training; GP registrars; GP trainers.

Introduction

THE Joint Committee for Postgraduate Training in General Practice (JCPTGP) has stated that carrying out audit should be a criterion for appointment as a training practice.¹ The submission of an audit project by general practice registrars is one of the four parts of summative assessment that all potential principals for general practice in the United Kingdom have had to pass from 4 September 1996.² Interviews with each of the registrars who failed their audit project, and a marking exercise given to all trainers in the West of Scotland, suggested a problem in the teaching of audit methods in some training practices.³

This study set out to address the issue of teaching audit to registrars and whether summative assessment had had an impact on this.

Method

Two questionnaires were designed in a similar format — one for the 151 trainers and the other for 116 registrars in the West of Scotland in 1996. The questions were derived from interviews with a random selection of trainers, from a series of one-to-one discussions with all registrars who had 'failed' their resubmitted audit project, and with a random group of registrars who had passed their audit project. The issues raised were confidence with audit methods, the teaching of audit methods, methods of teaching, teaching needs, and the teaching of information technology. The answers were set on a five-point Likert scale with 1 representing a minimum score and 5 a maximum score.

Results

There was a response rate of 85.4% from the trainers and 99% from the registrars. Sixty-four trainers (50%) and 60 registrars (52%) were confident or very confident with audit methods. Sixty-eight trainers (54%) and 95 registrars (82%) stated that their confidence with audit methods had changed since the submission of a summative assessment audit project. A total of 46

trainers (35%) were confident with teaching audit methods, and the summative assessment audit project had changed the confidence of 59 trainers (45%). In all, 41 registrars (35%) were confident or very confident with the perceived standard of audit methods teaching they had received. Most or all of the audit teaching was carried out by 55 trainers (47%), with the practice nurse or practice manager contributing in only 11 cases (9%). Audit teaching involved informal discussion, for example at a practice meeting, for 114 trainers (88%); the demonstration of a completed audit for 100 trainers (77%); a formal tutorial on audit for 84 trainers (65%); and recommending a book to read for 41 trainers (32%). Information technology was taught to 48 registrars (42%), mainly by informal discussion. Trainers' and registrars' perceived needs for more teaching are shown in Table 1.

Discussion

This research arose from concern at the inability of a small number of registrars to submit a successful audit project for summative assessment after two attempts. The high response rate to the questionnaires, particularly from the registrars, reflects the seriousness with which they considered the subject.

Despite the obvious difference in years of experience in general practice, there is a remarkable similarity in trainers' and registrars' confidence with audit methods. The registrars' confidence may be explained by the fact that they had just finished their audit project for summative assessment, the results of which had become known to them, and this is given some added weight by the impact the summative assessment audit project is claimed to have made for the confidence of more than 80% of the registrars. The audit project had also increased the confidence of more than 50% of the trainers.

The trainers' confidence in teaching audit methods and the confidence with which that teaching was received by the registrars is very similar. However, only one third in each group expressed their confidence in a positive way. The summative assessment audit project increased confidence in just under 50% of the trainers and, despite audit being a very practical subject, informal discussion, such as at a practice meeting, formed a large part of registrars' teaching. Just over two-thirds of registrars had a completed audit demonstrated to them and, given the impact the summative assessment audit project had on their confidence, the message to trainers is that there is no better teaching method than encouraging the registrar to take part in as many audit projects as possible.

Trainers feel a greater need for help with teaching on more complex areas such as literature searching and interpreting data. Their registrars are more concerned with very basic audit methods, suggesting that there is still a lack of teaching prior to their general practice registrar year. With the increasing complexity of training, there is much more scope for a practice nurse and manager to have a bigger role in teaching audit and information technology to the registrars.

In conclusion, the submission of an audit project for summative assessment has made an important contribution to understanding teaching needs about audit methods. More account needs to be taken of the expertise of the wider primary health care team and the deficiencies in the teaching of information technology.

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Table 1. Perceived needs for teaching in audit methods.

Needs	Trainers (n = 129)	Registrars (n = 115)
Choosing an appropriate audit subject	20 (15%)	27 (24%)
Choosing criteria	41 (32%)	35 (31%)
Advising on a literature search	51 (39%)	22 (19%)
Setting appropriate standards	40 (31%)	37 (32%)
Appropriate preparation and planning of an audit	34 (26%)	27 (24%)
Interpretation of data	49 (38%)	17 (15%)
Implementing change	31 (24%)	23 (20%)

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