

Exploring reasons for differences in performance between UK and International Medical Graduates in the Membership of the Royal College of General Practitioners Applied Knowledge Test: a cognitive interview study



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The study

First study exploring variations in exam performance employing cognitive interviewing methods

Questions:

- What are the differences in approach between UK (UKGs) and International Medical Graduates (IMGs) answering AKT questions?
- To what extent might this relate to differences in performance?

Why important: High stakes exam with serious consequences for failure

Background: CSA legal challenge in 2014 found no discrimination based upon examiner judgments - but documented statistical differences including in AKT where examiner bias less likely

Aims and objectives : To explore differences across three subgroups of doctors in GP speciality training by:

- 1. Ethnicity
- 2. Source of primary medical qualification
- Comparative analysis: White British/Irish UK trained (UKGs) Black & Minority (BME UKGs) and IMGs

Methods: Systematic grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1998)

Analysis of data from 'think aloud' interviews of GPSTs while answering up to 15 questions from the AKT

Participants: 21 GPSTs (Years 1-3) including 13 IMGs & 8 UK trained doctors aged 24 -64 years from East Midlands, Jan – April 2017

What we found

Theme 1: Theoretical vs real-life clinical experience

Real life better than classroom experience, clinical exposure to specialties (e.g. ophthalmology) or specialty topics helped, textbook learning and memorisation helped for rare diagnoses

Theme 2: Recency, frequency, opportunity and relevance

Recent and repeated exposure helpful; limited opportunity for gaining experience where gender barriers, uncommon presentations, or data interpretation and statistics; some topics considered less relevant to general practice were less well answered

Theme 3: Competence and insight

Overconfidence led to inaccurate self evaluation

Theme 4: Cultural barriers

IMGs were unfamiliar with the NHS, national (NICE) guidance, abbreviations and exam format

Conclusions: Candidates found difficulties answering AKT questions which may be addressed through training.

IMGs faced additional difficulties due to differences in educational experience, content familiarity and language barriers - all potentially amenable to additional training support.

References

Pattinson J, Blow C, Sinha B, et al Exploring reasons for differences in performance between UK and international medical graduates in the Membership of the Royal College of General Practitioners Applied Knowledge Test: a cognitive interview study BMJ Open

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