General Practitioners Perspectives on Revised Entry and Selection Methods to Medicine and the HPAT

Abstract:

T Dennehy1, M Kelly1, S O’Flynn3,4
South West Specialist Training Programme in General Practice
1Discipline of General Practice, NUI Galway
Medical Education Unit, School of Medicine, University College Cork, Cork

Introduction

The introduction in Ireland of a revised process to determine admission to medical school has been contentious. Reforms in 2009 included the introduction of the HPAT (Health Professions Admission Test) coupled with an adjustment of the weighting applied to the Leaving Certificate and a moderation of the calculation of Leaving Certificate points. The HPAT is a 2½ hour multiple choice paper. It comprises three sections: 1. Logical Reasoning and Problem Solving; 2. Interpersonal Understanding and 3. Non-Verbal Reasoning. It belongs to a family of selection tools that test general mental ability. Other similar agh tests include the UMAT, used in Australia and the UKCAT which was introduced to Great Britain in 2006. Research in the area of entry and selection to medical school is growing internationally. There is an increasing acceptance that the more traditional approaches to selection such as sole reliance on academic achievement or traditional interview are of themselves insufficient to select tomorrows doctors. It is important however that specialised admission tests are acceptable to stakeholders and that the assessment items therein appear relevant i.e. achieve face validity. To date this important question has received less attention. Previously the performances of Consultant Surgeons, NCHDs and Medical Students in a modified HPAT were analysed this study no results of statistical significance were returned, however the performance of consultant surgeons was only minimally better than undergraduate medical students. This caused the authors to question the acceptability of the test. In a separate study the Leaving Certificate and a modified HPAT were both found to be predictive of college exam performance; however they were not corrgated with each other leading the authors to conclude that were assessing different applicant attributes. General Practitioners are an important and influential stakeholder group representing the career pathway chosen by approximately 50% of all future medical school entrants. We were keen to ascertain the level of knowledge amongst GPs regarding the new system for admission into medicine; establish their views on its acceptability; determine their performance in sample questions and evaluate their perception of the relevance of test items used.

Methods

This was a quantitative observational study, using a 27 item questionnaire and three sample HPAT questions. Section 1 determined demographics; Section 2 assessed knowledge of the HPAT and the revised selection criteria; Section 3 established GPs views on acceptability of the HPAT, the Leaving Certificate and other tools for the selection of medical students and; Section 4 comprised three sample HPAT questions which the GPs answered and subsequently rated on a four point likert scale in terms of relevance to medical practice. Questionnaires were posted, with a participant information letter and consent form, to a convenience sample of 143 GPs from the Cork Registry (ICGP Directory) and to the 12 GP trainees of the Cork Specialist Training Programme in General Practice, in year two at the time of the questionnaire (September 2010). Telephone reminders to non responders were conducted one week later. Ethical approval was obtained from the Research Ethics Committee of the Cork Teaching Hospitals (CREC). All data was entered and analysed using SPSS 17.0 for Windows (SPSS, Inc., Chicago, IL, USA).

Results

Demographics

A response rate of 122 (79%) was achieved comprising 114 GPs and 8 GP trainees of which there were 67 males and 54 females (one respondent did not complete this section). Ages ranged from 30 to 69 years. The majority of respondents were aged between 30-49 years.

Figure 1

Knowledge of HPAT

Respondents were asked to rate their own knowledge of the HPAT on a seven point likert scale. The majority 92 respondents, (75.4%) reported they had little or no knowledge of the HPAT while only 4 respondents, (3.3%) felt they had good knowledge. GPs seemed unaware of who designs the HPAT paper annually (40 respondents, 33%). The majority, 96 respondents, (78.7%), also seemed unsure of how entry points were calculated based on combined HPAT and Leaving Certificate scores.
Acceptability of personality trait testing is less validated. Influenced by recent innovations in that format or experience with these at post graduate level however the many seemed to be in favour of the use of interviews and personality trait testing. The support for interviews may be.

GPs appear to embrace the use of selection tools other than knowledge-based tests such as the Leaving Certificate and mechanisms it would seem that there also was some dissatisfaction with the previous system as only one tenth strongly.

Introduction. However, as the attrition rate in medical school is low, the selection process effectively determines who.

The GPs in this survey report a knowledge gap with respect to the HPAT and the detail of the revised selection mechanisms. It is not obvious limitations to this study; the sample size was relatively small and represents a convenience sample. The strength of this work is that it evaluates the knowledge and opinion of the new entry and selection mechanisms of a.

Table 1 captures the pattern of correct responses to sample HPAT questions, one from each of the three Sections of a.

Respondents answered only three HPAT test questions, hence, findings cannot be generalised to the entire HPAT paper. Other unidentified issues may be at play. Many GPs correctly identify the degree to which socioeconomic status; 87, (71.3%) agreed on some level that it did affect the Leaving Certificate assessment. This is further illustrated in Figure.


Email: siun.oflynn@ucc.ie

Correspondence: S O’Flynn

Department of Medical Education, University College Cork, Cork

References


4. ACER Health Professions Admission Test Ireland http://www.hpat-ireland.acer.edu.au/ accessed 29/05/2012

5. UKCAT Consortium The UK Clinical Aptitude Test http://www.ukcat.ac.uk/ accessed 29/05/2012


11. Halpenny D, Cadoo K, Halpenny M,Burke J, Torreggiani WC. The Health Professions Admission Test (HPAT) score and.


