



A call for greater transparency in the evidence base supporting the BMAT

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To set the scene, I announced that a man sat in front of them, breathless and unable to speak. No other medical personnel were present, and they alone could work out the diagnosis and treat the patient. The clues they had were four envelopes, which contained an ECG, a chest X-ray, blood and sputum cultures, and the results of an arterial blood gas.

The students were given minimal background information: simple guides to interpreting the basics of each investigation; a brief medical glossary to explain terms such as acidosis, consolidation and tachycardia; a list of eleven possible diagnoses with expected corresponding findings in the clues; and the clues themselves. They were allowed to see each clue for up to five minutes, but could not see the same clue again once their time with it had elapsed.

Following initial trepidation, they quickly got to work in groups of four. The underlying diagnosis was an infective exacerbation of COPD, with the clues corresponding to this (e.g. an ECG showing sinus tachycardia and a hyper-expanded chest X-ray). Satisfaction was audible as pennies dropped around the room, students spotting what they were looking for in each "clue".

Three out of the four groups arrived at the correct diagnosis, and the final group came close, but wrongly identified the case as acute respiratory distress syndrome due to misinterpretation of the chest X-ray. Despite no medical background, the students were able to suggest oxygen, antibiotics and inhalers as the treatment they would want to provide.

Diagnosing medical cases provides potent opportunities to raise scientific curiosity and develop problem-solving skills, even to those years away from considering starting medical school. I left the session impressed at the students' abilities and reinvigorated in enthusiasm for teaching.

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A call for greater transparency in the evidence base supporting the BMAT

Dear Sir

The BioMedical Admissions Test (BMAT) and the United Kingdom Clinical Aptitude Test (UKCAT) are the two major aptitude tests used for the selection of medical students in the UK. The importance of using evidence-based practices in admissions processes is undeniable, as is the need for the evidence to be more transparent and accessible. Whilst the predictive validity of the UKCAT has been well established by peer-reviewed publications, there has been a relative

paucity in the peer-reviewed evidence supporting the use of the BMAT.

Accordingly, we advocate that the evidence base for the BMAT be expanded. Specifically, it is necessary to improve access to existing unpublished data held by admissions offices, and for the effectiveness of the BMAT to be assessed using rigorous, peer-approved research methods. The advantage of promoting this is two-fold. Firstly, the peer-reviewed evidence evaluating the predictive validity of the BMAT (Emery & Bell 2009), albeit convincing, is solely limited to the University of Cambridge, which follows a traditional course structure with a prominent pre-clinical/clinical divide. Further studies to probe the applicability of the BMAT at institutions with different course styles will provide a more comprehensive overview on its effectiveness in candidate selection. This issue is particularly pertinent as institutions such as the University of Leeds and Brighton and Sussex Medical School begin incorporating the BMAT into their admissions processes. Secondly, much of the evidence pertaining to the BMAT is provided by its developers, Cambridge Assessment. The use of the BMAT will be more robustly supported by peer-reviewed articles written by independent authors than by reports published by Cambridge Assessment, who may have vested interests in the outcomes of any study they carry out.

To conclude, we are concerned by the apparent disparities in the evidence base supporting the UKCAT and the BMAT. We believe that evidence-based practices involving the use of the BMAT should be ultimately held to the same standards as that of the UKCAT.

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Reference

Emery JL, Bell JF. 2009. The predictive validity of the BioMedical Admissions Test for pre-clinical examination performance. *Med Edu* 43(6):557–564.

Ubiquitous-based testing in medical education

Dear Sir

Ubiquitous-based testing (UBT) is a variation of electronic assessment using smart devices (Huh 2012). UBT provides the

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