The selection process for postgraduate medical trainees is beset by a multitude of challenges. For programs, commonly available tools lack reliability (reference letter, personal statements, Dean’s letter), predictive validity for future clinical performance (USMLE Step 1), or resource capacity (multiple mini-interviews). For graduating medical students, commitments in time and money typically approach levels of infeasibility and unacceptability, as students apply more and more widely with no greater chance of matching [1]. A commonly used tool in employee selection, SJTs have recently been introduced into medical education, and have shown promise in providing meaningful information about candidates that are predictors of future success for both undergraduate medicine [2, 3] and residency [4]. CASPer® is an SJT which has quickly gained popularity across North America, initially for use at the level of undergraduate medical admissions, but more recently, for residency selection.

Aim

For medical resident selection, can an SJT be conducted reliably, feasibly, and acceptably?

Method

1,781 medical students completed CASPer in the 2017-2018 application cycle for entry into residency. Technical problems with applicant test completion were closely monitored and recorded both electronically and via a live helpdesk. Upon test completion, students were forwarded to an exit survey, where they are asked 7 questions on an anchored 10-point Likert scale, higher numbers being more positive:

1. How satisfied are you with the ease of signing up for the CASPer test?
2. How satisfied are you with the smoothness of the CASPer test delivery?
3. How satisfied are you with the overall CASPer test experience?
4. How satisfied are you with the customer support you received?
5. How well do you think the CASPer test will differentiate your personal characteristics compared to other applicants?
6. Does having the CASPer test as a requirement make you more or less likely to apply to a school?
7. How important is it to you that the program you are applying to values getting an objective measure of your personal characteristics?

Results

Reliability - The internal-consistency of CASPer scores was very high (α = 0.87).

Feasibility - 8.3% of applicants reported technical issues during the test, but with rare exception, problems were attributable to issues with the applicant internet connection or webcam, and not with conduct of the test itself; again, with rare exception, technical issues arising were all remediable.

Acceptability - Students were generally satisfied with the sign-up process (M = 8.65), test delivery (M = 8.90), overall test experience (M = 7.71), and customer support during the test (M = 8.20). Students also valued an assessment of personal characteristics for admissions (M = 6.91) and perceived the test to be reasonably face valid (M = 5.38). On average, student’s decisions about applying to a program were not influenced either positively or negatively by a program’s requirement to have them take CASPer (M = 4.81).

Conclusion

A properly conducted online SJT can provide a reliable, feasible, and acceptable assessment of non-cognitive skills of trainees applying for residency positions. Predictive validity has been demonstrated for selection of undergraduate medical trainees and should be confirmed for selection of postgraduate medical trainees. Use as a screening test, particularly given the paucity of other valid options, would open the door for programs to be more selective in both the quality and the quantity of applicants invited to interview, allowing programs and applicants alike the chance to dream of a smaller, less chaotic, interview process, and of the financial relief that might provide.

References


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