**Title: Attitudes Towards and Perceived Need for Communication Skills Training in Recently Admitted Undergraduate Medical Students**

**Authors: Jagdish Varma, Anusha Prabhakaran, Suman Singh**

**Review comments**

**Reviewer 1**

1. **Title** may be slightly reworded to Perceived Need and Attitudes Towards Communication Skills Training in Recently Admitted Undergraduate Medical Students.
2. **Abstract**: A bit more clarity and description on 'Single questions" can help the reader. Clarification on 'ambiguous' about what would be useful. Key points of actual conclusion would enable the reader to have a gist of the article and encourage to read further. Suggested that key words could be a bit more specific to the article itself, like CSAS or CST
3. **Introduction**: Referencing to newest regulations by MCI (2017) would have been more appropriate. Reference for 'Foundation course' would also be necessary.  
   The introduction could probably add more value if it could address the issues due to lack of communication skills and point towards the need for equipping medical students with such skills. The portion on US and Sri Lankan students would suit the discussion section better.
4. **Methods**: An explanation on why the researchers in this study chose the modified version instead of the original would be useful. Referencing style isn’t uniform. Was the omitted item number 1 or 26? There seems to be an item missing from the numbers mentioned.
5. **Results**: No tables are attached or present at end of the article. Kindly mention what is given in brackets next to the mean score, SD if it indicates standard deviation.
6. **Discussion**: Last few lines in 1st paragraph of discussion on authors opinion may be brought a little later in the discussion. Also, last two lines of the paragraph may be better worded.
7. References: 2 - Kindly check for year of article and correct style of referencing. 7 - Can you kindly check if the journal mentioned is correct? It seems to be an article in British Journal of Education, Society & Behavioural Science.
8. The addressing of the issue by one of the authors is very commendable. Can you also tell us if the students are receptive to this or do you plan to have another study to see how attitudes have changed?

Please also see further comments inserted in the text of the manuscript.

**Reviewer 2**  
The article is from the Indian perspective. However, the modified questionnaire used in the study is from Sri Lanka which has similar compartmentalized medical education.

In the abstract, please mention how many students were contacted and how many responded (thus giving a response rate).  
  
It could certainly influence practice or policy but needs to be backed by stronger evidence and justifications as detailed below.

1. The reference for Foundation Course in the first paragraph of the Introduction should have been MCI Vision 2015 document where it is detailed rather than GME 2012. The second paragraph also warrants mention of Attitude and Communication (AT-COM) module which is proposed longitudinally to address ethics and communication skills.
2. In the Methods section of the main manuscript, please give details of participant enrolment. What means did you use to invite them? Where did you distribute the questionnaires? Were students allowed to take them home and return them some other day after filling them at leisure or did they have to complete them in a fixed time of your choosing? I’m presuming they were paper questionnaires although it is not explicit. How often did you plan to contact the students who had not yet submitted completed questionnaires? What attempts did you make to improve the response rate? What did you plan to do about incomplete responses? Was it a voluntary exercise? What methods did you use to protect the students who did not want to participate?
3. Specific item numbers in positive and negative attitude CSAS subscales may be deleted
4. Its not clear whether the participants were exposed to any CST during the foundation course.
5. In the Results Section, how many students returned incomplete questionnaires and how many returned blank questionnaires? What method was used to calculate response rate? Please give a reference to the formula used. I would recommend that the authors use AAPOR to calculate their response rate - <http://www.aapor.org/Education-Resources/For-Researchers/Poll-Survey-FAQ/Response-Rates-An-Overview.aspx>)
6. The Discussion section needs major overhaul. How the author jumped to conclusion that ‘this was a group of students that have not been exposed to any form of formal CST’? It is followed by an assumption based on their educational background which wasn’t discussed earlier in Methods. There needs to be a reference for ‘minimal emphasis on evaluation of the students’ soft skills’. There is no need to repeat Results in Discussion section. The authors propose certain steps to address attitudes which are already addressed in MCI’s ATCOM module.
7. In a study that examined attitudes towards communication skills before and after a communication skills course, investigators found that the students rated their communication skills significantly lower at the end of the course than before the start of the course. This reference may be of use to the authors. (Rees C, Sheard C. Evaluating first-year medical students’ attitudes to learning communication skills before and after a communication skills course. Med Teach. 2003;25:302-7.)
8. It should also be added in limitations that the study’s focus on perceptions is based on self-reports from medical students rather than actual behaviours towards communication skills training and actual communication abilities.
9. The conclusions are inadequate and have not been drawn from the results of this study.