Patterns of medical student attendance – a cohort study and survey

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BACKGROUND
Attendance is often cited as a key factor in undergraduate medical education (Vinceneux et al. 2000). The aim of this study was to determine attendance patterns among medical students in a clinical undergraduate programme and student and staff perceptions of the importance of attendance.

METHODS
A cohort study evaluating student attendance of all students attending over a full academic year from September 2011 to June 2012 was conducted. A student logbook was used to document attendance at all classroom-based activities and clinical activities. A survey establishing attitudes of all students and staff towards student attendance was then completed using an online anonymous survey tool (SurveyMonkey®).

RESULTS
The logbook was completed by 147 students (100%) and the survey was completed by 128 students (87%) and nine staff members (90%). The overall attendance rate across all activities was 90% and the attendance rate was similar for both classroom-based activities (90%) and clinical activities (89%). Poor attenders (defined as more than one standard deviation below the mean attendance rate i.e. 79%) were more likely to be male, to be rostered for the first rotation and to have previously failed an end-of-year examination. Many poor attenders turned up on a daily basis but only attended a proportion of their required activities for that day.

Both students and staff placed a high importance on attendance. The vast majority of students and staff (75% and 88% respectively) believed that student attendance should be mandatory and that it was reasonable to monitor attendance (84% and 100% respectively). Students were divided over whether attendance should contribute to academic credit (40% in favour) in contrast to staff members who were almost universally enthusiastic (89% in favour). The majority of students (63%) acknowledged that they attended activities they would not have otherwise attended had they not been required to document their attendance.

CONCLUSIONS
Students and staff rate the importance of attendance highly and this was reflected in high attendance rates for both classroom-based activities and clinical activities. Undergraduate programmes need to address attendance for male students, students on early rotations and students with previous academic underperformance.

REFERENCE