

The Peer Assisted Learning Scheme: Improving student engagement with Anatomy using the *In-Through-Out* Transition model

A ROSE, L SINGH, A CAMERON, A VENKATESH

Anatomy@
Aberdeen

Institute of Education in Medical and Dental Sciences,
School of Medicine, Medical Sciences and Nutrition, University of Aberdeen

PALS
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Background and Methods:

Gross Anatomy at the University of Aberdeen's Medical School is taught in Years 1, 2 and 3 of MBChB. Literature suggests that medical students would benefit from the anatomy course spread over the entire undergraduate curriculum¹ with concerns expressed by some authorities that students lack sufficient anatomy knowledge required for residencies and clerkships².

We propose that the Peer Assisted Learning Scheme (PALS) that was introduced in Practical Anatomy sessions in MBChB in 2013 helps tutors and tutees engage with practical anatomy at all levels of the MBChB curriculum improving students' anatomical knowledge. Using results from a questionnaire based study delivered to Year 1 MBChB student tutees and Year 5 MBChB student tutors; we show how PALS improves engagement of junior and senior students with Anatomy and map the benefits of PALS to the University of Aberdeen's In – Through – Out Transitions³ model.

Results

PALS tutees' Transitions "In": Results from 117 Year 1 MBChB students (tutees) is shown in the graph below.

PALS tutees' Transitions "Through": 69.2% of tutees (79/117) agreed or strongly agreed that "PALS tutors made me think about/reflect on what I learnt". While 28.2% (33) tutees acknowledged that PALS tutors may provide incorrect information and 28.2% (33) were ambivalent, 88.9% of students agreed that they liked being taught by PALS tutors. We believe that this shows tutees are taking responsibility for their own learning (adult learning).

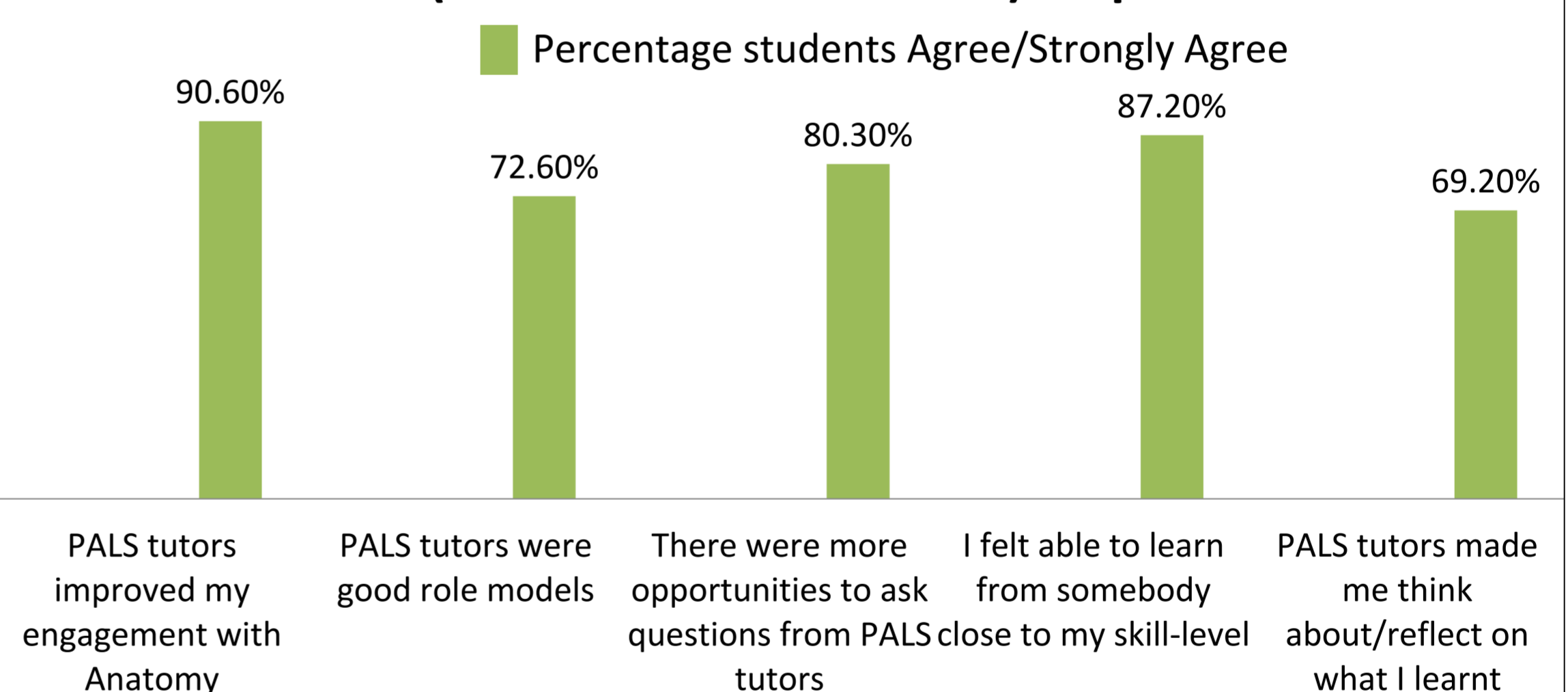
PALS tutors Transitions "Out": Amongst Year 5 MBChB students (peer tutors) the number who felt that their anatomy knowledge was adequate for the Foundation Programme rose from 44% (11/25) before the session to 68% (17/25) after. Almost all students (21/25: 80%) felt that preparing for the PALS sessions gave them a deeper understanding of anatomical concepts. In 2015-16, PALS tutors were also given the opportunity to apply for recognition through the STAR (Students Taking Active Roles) award⁴, which required participation in 2 skill development workshops, maintaining a record of participation in PALS and attending a competency-based interview. When awarded a silver or gold STAR award this would be recorded on the enhanced student transcript



Final Year medical student (in green lab coat) peer tutoring junior medical students.

- Ethical approval for the study relating to peer tutor perceptions was obtained from the College Ethical Review Board
- Evaluation of peer tutee experiences was carried out as part of the LTEP (Learning and Teaching Enhancement Programme) funded PALS project on Enhancement theme.

Tutee (Year 1 MBChB students) responses



Conclusion

PALS in Anatomy improves junior students' experience and engagement with the Practical Anatomy course thus promoting Transitions "In" to the course. Interacting with peer tutors who are senior students promotes reflection and aid in students adopting adult learning principles – such as taking responsibility for their own learning ("Through" transitions). For the tutors (senior students), making the transition from a student to a peer tutor led to significant gains in anatomical knowledge, concepts and confidence following peer tutoring sessions. It is particularly relevant in this context, as it shows a simple way in which to redress the perceived lack of anatomical knowledge in junior doctors, by providing opportunities for peer teaching in the pre-clinical course, which they would traditionally, no longer have access to.

We therefore conclude that the Peer Assisted Learning Scheme perpetuates a "win-win" situation allowing improved engagement of both junior and senior MBChB students with Anatomy.

References:

1. Collins JP. 2008. Modern approaches to teaching and learning anatomy. *BMJ* 337:a1310.
2. Warner JH, Rizzolo LJ. 2006. Anatomical instruction and training for professionalism from the 19th to the 21st centuries. *Clin Anat* 19:403–414.
3. Perkins J, Hickman Z. The Career Service: Supporting Student Transitions
4. <https://www.abdn.ac.uk/careers/skills-attributes/star-award.php> The STAR award