



Improving ABSITE scores with a structured curriculum supported by small group learning sessions

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Purpose

The purpose of this improvement project is to compare various methods of test preparation within a surgical residency program.

Methods

Changes in the academic program at the Brody School of Medicine at East Carolina University and the Vidant Health System were reviewed from the years 2017 to 2019. These included 1) small and large group learning sessions, 2) different curricula, 3) question banks, and 4) resident lectures supervised by a faculty member within that specialty. 5) Resident test results were also reviewed to determine if there was a correlation between higher exam scores and certain strategies in preparing for the American Board of Surgery In-Service Training Examination (ABSITE). After the 2019 ABSITE examination, a survey was completed by residents reviewing their preparation for the test. Finally, we searched for 6) a correlation between question bank use, a favored method of studying at our institution, and percent correct answers on ABSITE.

Results

All classes increased their test percentiles and their median percent-correct answers on the 2019 exam when compared with previous years. Three out of five classes scored better than the national average in 2019 (Table 1). Although popular within the residency, there was no correlation between the number of questions completed on the TrueLearn question bank and the percent correct on the actual ABSITE exam (Table 2). Furthermore, there was no correlation between the number of SCORE weekly quizzes completed and ABSITE percent correct answers. Based on the survey results, residents preferred independent study time, question banks, and small group learning sessions to prepare for the exam.

ABSITE RESULTS (Median Percent Correct)				
	2017	2018	2019	Nat'l
R1	60	62	61*	60
R2	63	69	71*	69
R3	73	73	73	74
R4	79	71	75	76
R5	73	75	77*	76

Table 1. Institutional ABSITE results from 2017-2019. Score increases are highlighted in green. “*” indicates a score higher than the national average in 2019.

% TL questions completed	ABSITE % correct (Range) n=32	Mean % Correct on ABSITE
>75%	60-81%	71%
>50%	54-81%	70%
<50%	40-81%	69%

Table 2. No correlation between number of TrueLearn questions completed and mean % correct on ABSITE.

Conclusion

ABSITE test results are directly related to first-time pass on the American Board of Surgery written exam supporting the importance of exam preparation and resident test results.

Based on our survey results, residents feel independent study and question banks are important factors in test preparation. Within our program, the shift toward a more structured curriculum and small group learning sessions correlated with an increase in ABSITE score percentiles and median percent correct