

Grit Scores: A Predictor of Medical School Success? [Letter]

This article was published in the following Dove Press journal:
Advances in Medical Education and Practice

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Dear editor,

We read with great interest the article by Alzerwi regarding the effect of grit on academic performance of medical students and the potential to incorporate more non-academic personality aspects into the selection process.¹ Medical school and the career thereafter can certainly be physically and emotionally demanding, and perseverance is key in getting through. We appreciate the author's effort into conducting this study; however, certain factors need addressing.

First, we agree that subjectivity can influence the reliability of results when it comes to responding to the survey. Importantly however, the 12-item grit questionnaire is not specific to medical education and there is a possibility that students may have integrated behaviour that cross several domains. To illustrate the potential for confounders, one may achieve a score of five for the first question of the survey if they have overcome setbacks in life;² however, overcoming a challenge in one domain of life, for example, within personal relationships, does not necessarily translate into overcoming a challenge within academia. The non-specific nature of this questionnaire allows individuals to think outside of just medicine or education and therefore, it assumes that the same skills will be utilised across domains, which may not be the case. Indeed, this is supported by a study by Duckworth et al who found that grit scale responses are more domain-general than domain-specific.³ Perhaps, by clarifying to the students to specifically respond to the questionnaire in the context of education, the grit score obtained may be more representative and a better predictor of student success.

Another shortcoming of using grit scores as predictors for students passing without having to repeat years is that the score then becomes a snapshot of an individual's perseverance at a single moment in time. Naturally, if circumstances change, a student's grit score may change. In a study by De Vera et al, the authors argued that grit has a "strong reliance on external or social support systems and internal factors of motivation"⁴ Along this vein, the presence of support systems may explain why the study found that native students achieve higher GPAs, which has a positive statistical correlation with grit.¹ Therefore, it is difficult to rely on this snapshot score as a predictor of student success across the duration of their course. Unforeseen events such as a breakdown in one's support system, or in internal motivation due to mental health problems or bereavement, may hinder the utility of grit as a predictive measure of success throughout medical school.

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The findings of this study are critical and may influence the way we assess aspiring and current medical students. Nevertheless, we wonder what impact confounding variables may have on the prospective utility of a grit score given its cross-sectional assessment of one's life circumstances. Finally, we suggest that it may be useful to compare the grit scores of individuals that have failed one year to those that have failed multiple. This would provide further insight into the robustness of the connection between grit scores and academic success.

Disclosure

The authors declare no conflicts of interest in this communication.

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