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## ORIGINAL RESEARCH ARTICLES

### Free Open Access Medical Education resource knowledge and utilisation amongst Emergency Medicine trainees: A survey in four countries



#### *Connaissance et utilisation des ressources en enseignement médical gratuit en accès libre chez les stagiaires en médecine d'urgence: une enquête dans quatre pays*

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#### Introduction

Free Open Access Medical Education encompasses a broad array of free online resources and discussion fora. The aim of this paper was to describe whether Emergency Medicine trainees in different contexts know about Free Open Access Medical Education, whether or not they know about its different platforms, which ones they use, and what the major barriers to regular usage are.

#### Methods

A convenience sample was surveyed on awareness and use of Free Open Access Medical Education blogs, podcasts, websites and Twitter at three institutions (in Australia, Botswana and Papua New Guinea) and one deanery (United Kingdom) between June 2013 and June 2014 using an online survey tool or via hand-distributed survey.

#### Results

44 trainees responded: four from Botswana, seven from Papua New Guinea, ten from the United Kingdom and 23 from Australia. 82% were aware of blogs, 80% of websites, 75% of podcasts and 61% of Twitter as resources in Emergency Medicine. Awareness and use of specific resources were lower in Botswana and Papua New Guinea. For blogs, podcasts and websites, trainees who had looked at a resource at least once were neutral or agreed that it was relevant. For Twitter, some trainees found it difficult to navigate or not relevant. Lack of awareness of resources rather than lack of internet access was the main barrier to use.

#### Conclusion

The Emergency Medicine trainees in both developed and low resource settings studied were aware that Free Open Access Medical Education resources exist, but trainees in lower income settings were generally less aware of specific resources. Lack of internet and device access was not a barrier to use in this group.

**Introduction:** L'enseignement médical gratuit en accès libre englobe un large éventail de ressources et forums de discussion gratuits en ligne. Les objectifs de cette étude sont de décrire si les stagiaires en médecine d'urgence dans différents contextes ont connaissance de l'enseignement médical gratuit en accès libre, s'ils ont ou non ils ont connaissance de ses différentes plateformes, quelles sont celles qu'ils utilisent et quels sont les principaux obstacles à leur utilisation régulière.

**Méthodes:** Une enquête a été menée sur un échantillon de commodité sur la sensibilisation aux blogs, podcasts, sites Internet et comptes Twitter sur l'enseignement médical gratuit en accès libre et leur utilisation, dans trois établissements (en Australie, au Botswana et en Papouasie-Nouvelle-Guinée) et un doyen (Royaume-Uni) entre juin 2013 et juin 2014, en utilisant un outil d'enquête en ligne ou par le biais d'un questionnaire distribué en personne.

**Résultats:** 44 stagiaires ont répondu: quatre provenant du Botswana, sept de Papouasie-Nouvelle-Guinée, dix du Royaume-Uni et 23 d'Australie. 82% connaissaient les blogs, 80% les sites, 75% les podcasts et 61% les comptes Twitter en tant que ressources en médecine d'urgence. La sensibilisation et l'utilisation de ressources spécifiques étaient plus faibles au Botswana et en Papouasie-Nouvelle-Guinée. Concernant les blogs, les podcasts et les sites Web, les stagiaires qui avaient consulté une ressource au moins une fois en avaient une opinion neutre ou convenaient qu'elle était pertinente. Concernant Twitter, certains stagiaires ont trouvé qu'il était difficile d'y naviguer ou estimaient le service non pertinent. Le principal obstacle à l'utilisation était le manque de sensibilisation aux ressources plutôt que le manque d'accès à Internet.

**Conclusion:** Les stagiaires en médecine d'urgence interrogés dans les pays développés comme dans les contextes à faibles ressources étaient conscients de l'existence de ressources en enseignement médical gratuit en accès libre, mais les stagiaires dans les contextes à faible revenu étaient généralement moins conscients des ressources spécifiques. Le manque d'accès à Internet ou à des appareils n'était pas un obstacle à l'utilisation au sein de ce groupe.

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## African relevance

- Emergency Medicine training programmes are increasing in number in Africa.
- Free Open Access Medical education may be a useful tool in low- and middle-income countries' emergency medical training.

## 1. Introduction

In 2012, a movement was coined amongst Emergency Medicine (EM) and critical care practitioners as Free Open Access Medical education (FOAM), also known by the Twitter hashtag #FOAMed.<sup>1,2</sup> It encompasses a broad array of free online resources and discussion fora aimed at breaking down traditional barriers to knowledge translation<sup>3</sup> and facilitating online dialogue between practitioners who otherwise would not have the chance to interact.

The FOAM concept started with a small sector of practitioners and is now embraced more broadly by the mainstream. Its acceptance is such that the journal Emergency Medicine Australasia has devoted a regular section to 'social media' where selected FOAM content will be represented in the journal on a monthly basis.<sup>4,5</sup>

A further global discussion now occurring is around how to best teach and practice evidence based Emergency Medicine in low resource settings.<sup>6-8</sup> This challenge is being raised by an increasing number of emergency physicians as the speciality grows globally and training programmes are flourishing in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs). Emergency Medicine training programmes are now underway in Botswana,<sup>9</sup> Papua New Guinea (PNG),<sup>10</sup> Myanmar,<sup>11</sup> Tanzania,<sup>12</sup> Ghana<sup>13</sup> and many more countries each with their own contexts and challenges.

Most Emergency Medicine textbooks have been written for practice in developed countries and do not address best practice in lower resource settings. Journals are not universally available to trainees due to cost and relevant information is not easily located amongst the thousands of articles published daily. These resources also may not address patient presentations and issues frequently encountered in resource-constrained settings, where 'best practice' care may simply not be achievable.

FOAM is a phenomenon that could potentially support trainees all over the world and could address some of these issues. At present, though, most of what is available via FOAM is focused on care delivery in developed contexts.

The aims of this paper were to describe whether Emergency Medicine trainees in different resource contexts know about FOAM, whether or not they know about different FOAM platforms, which ones they use, and what the major barriers to regular usage are.

## 2. Methods

A convenience sample of all Emergency Medicine trainees in four institutions connected to the authors was approached to participate. The participants worked at hospitals in three cities and one deanery in four countries, namely, the United Kingdom (UK), Australia, Botswana and PNG, between June 2013 and June 2014. 100% of all of Botswana's trainees were offered the chance to participate, with 58% of trainees in PNG at the time and much smaller samples approximating <1% of trainees in the UK and Australia. A much larger, more representative sample size would have been optimal but was logistically difficult given the geographical spread of potential participants. Participants were questioned about their knowledge, attitudes and practice relating to resources available under the umbrella term FOAM.

**Table 1** Content of Free Open Access Medical education (FOAM) resources and country of origin.

FOAM type	Content/focus	Country of origin
<i>Blogs</i>		
Emcrit <sup>20*</sup>	EM and critical care	US
Life in the Fast Lane <sup>21</sup>	EM and critical care	Australia
St Emlyn's <sup>22*</sup>	EM topics	UK
Academic Life in Emergency Medicine <sup>19</sup>	EM topics	US
Broomedocs <sup>23*</sup>	Rural and remote practice	Australia
<i>Podcasts</i>		
The Ultrasound Podcast <sup>24</sup>	Bedside EM ultrasound	US
SmartEM <sup>25</sup>	EBM in EM	US
ERCast <sup>26</sup>	EM topics	US
Pre-Hospital And Retrieval Medicine <sup>27</sup>	Pre-hospital and retrieval topics	Australia
The Skeptic's Guide to Emergency Medicine <sup>3</sup>	EBM in EM	Canada
<i>Websites</i>		
The Global Medical Education Project <sup>28</sup>	Exam and resource website for EM and Critical Care	Australia
Radiopaedia <sup>29</sup>	Radiology website	Australia
The African Federation for Emergency Medicine <sup>30</sup>	EM in Africa	South Africa
Amal Mattu's ECG website <sup>31</sup>	ECGs and cardiology	US
Official College of Emergency Medicine website, local or nearby	EM from training perspective	Various

FOAM, Free Open Access Medical education; EM, emergency medicine; EBM, evidence-based medicine; ECG, electrocardiogram; US, United States of America; UK, United Kingdom.

\* Also a podcast.

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