ReCEnT Utility: A mixed-methods exploration of the effectiveness of Registrar Clinical Encounters in Training (ReCEnT) as a work-based assessment and Patient Encounter Tracking and Learning Tool (PETAL).

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Aim and objectives

This study aimed to address the gap in knowledge surrounding the use of Patient Encounter Tracking and Learning Tools (PETALs) in GP vocational training. We sought to explore GP registrars', supervisors, and Medical Educators' (MEs') perceptions of the effectiveness of ReCEnT as a PETAL within a programmatic assessment framework.

Methods

The 'ReCEnT Utility' study used a cross-sectional mixed-methods design, incorporating a quantitative questionnaire component and a qualitative component of interviews and focus groups.

Participants were from two Regional Training Organisations (RTOs) in Australia, GP Synergy and General Practice Training Tasmania (GPTT). Inclusion criteria for the qualitative component were; 2020 registrars who had participated in 2 or more rounds of ReCEnT and had completed their final ReCEnT round prior to the onset of Covid-19; and all current supervisors and MEs who had a registrar in 2019. Focus groups and interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed, and analysed inductively for key themes.

Results

The questionnaire response rates were: registrars 90/187 (48%), supervisors 182/818 (22%) and MEs 62/101 (61%). Twelve MEs and/or supervisors participated in one of three focus groups, and a total of 45 participants were individually interviewed (15 registrars, 14 MEs and 16 supervisors).

A majority of participants agreed/strongly agreed that their participation in ReCEnT helped them, or their registrar, reflect on their clinical practice and their learning and training needs. For registrars, half of participants agreed/strongly agreed that completing ReCEnT influenced them to make changes in their clinical practice (54%) and in their approach to learning and exam preparation (51%) (Figure 1).
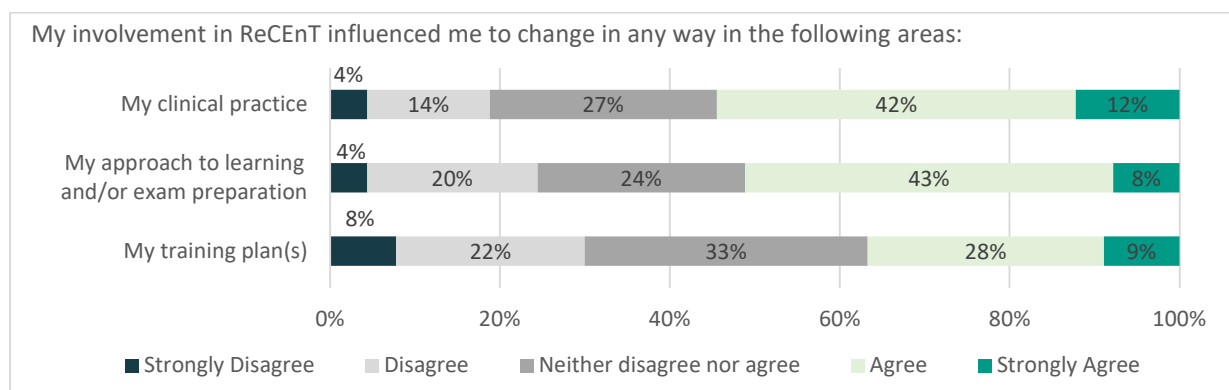

Figure 1: Registrar participants' ratings, by percentage, of key study outcomes

Qualitative data confirmed that registrars' ReCEnT Feedback Reports were used to facilitate reflection and identify learning needs. Interviews also revealed that ReCEnT provided registrars with reassurance and positive feedback when their training

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was on track. However, we found that registrar reflection was variable, and for some, may be cursory, or limited to benchmarking and comparison with peers or BEACH GPs, without further consideration or analysis. Enablers to using ReCEnT as a PETAL were identified. Specifically, a culture that values reflection, meaningful discussions between registrars and educators, and valuing objective data enabled ReCEnT to be used effectively. Constraints to using ReCEnT as a PETAL were misconceptions that ReCEnT was predominantly a research tool, that data entry was arduous for registrars, and that the timing of ReCEnT Feedback Reports was too late in the term to be utilised effectively. Key qualitative themes are provided in Figure 2.
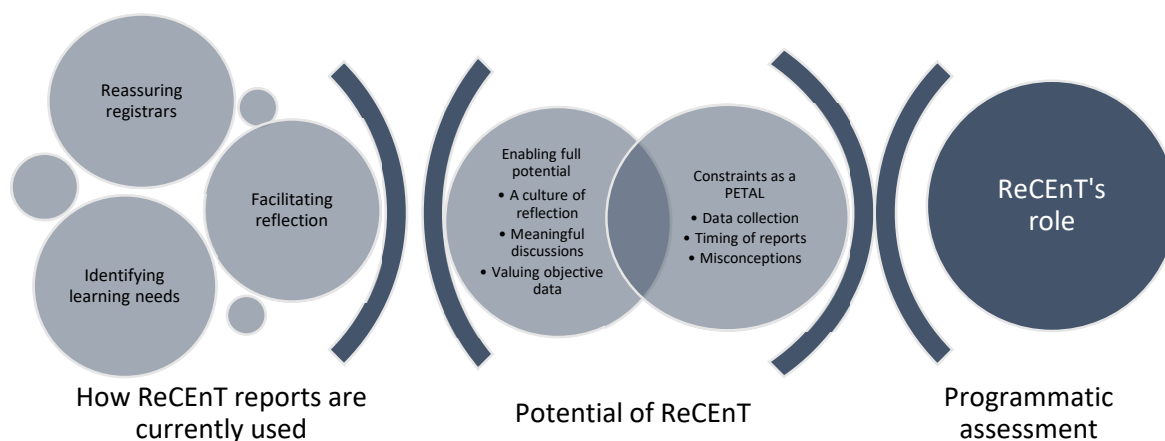

Figure 2: Overview of Key Themes

Of concern was the misconception regarding ReCEnT's role in a programmatic assessment framework. Many interviewees were fixated on a summative view of all assessments and struggled to understand how ReCEnT could be used in this way. This perception often continued even following an explanation that the purpose of ReCEnT was to be a formative assessment *for* learning rather than *of* learning within programmatic assessment.

Discussion

ReCEnT Feedback Reports are regarded as a useful tool to facilitate registrar reflection on their practice and identification of learning needs. Nevertheless, our findings indicated that registrar reflection can be variable. Meaningful discussions between registrars and educators were key in helping registrars fully understand their clinical practice and learning/training needs, which in turn helped to identify areas for change. The findings indicated that while ReCEnT has usefulness as a PETAL, further education and upskilling of educators is needed for ReCEnT to reach its full potential as a tool *for* learning within programmatic assessment.

Given the very limited literature available on the utility of PETALs in Australia and internationally, our findings will add significantly to knowledge in this area.

Implications

ReCEnT offers a hands-on tool to enable self-reflection practice. This can result in a powerful learning experience, contributing to a culture of lifelong learning that embraces all types of feedback. Educators, therefore, have key roles both to encourage registrar self-reflection and understanding of their ReCEnT Feedback Reports, but also to assist in identifying appropriate strategies for change in learning, training, and practice. Upskilling of supervisors and MEs is needed to optimise ReCEnT as a learning tool for registrars and to provide positive role models of how ReCEnT can be used as a tool *for* learning within a programmatic assessment framework.

Future research

Future research could assess the type and frequency of reflection that ReCEnT facilitates among registrars, and further explore the extent to which registrars, supervisors and MEs perceive ReCEnT's value as a learning tool within a programmatic assessment framework following targeted training.

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