Podcasting in Medical Education: How Long Should an Educational Podcast Be?

We were pleased to read guidance for the development of podcasts for graduate medical education (GME) in the July 2016 issue of the *Journal of Graduate Medical Education*. Ahn and colleagues[1] recommended a 10- to 20-minute format for a podcast, and we would like to expand on that recommendation and share additional input on style and format concerns.

How long will trainees listen to an educational podcast? What is the ideal length for learning? Primary evidence may be lacking, but there appears to be a consensus that learner attention in lecture settings wanes after 10 minutes.[2] We recently shared our own 20-minute pilot podcast for telephone triage education with pediatrics residents to better evaluate format and length issues. We have done this subjectively using a survey and objectively using the YouTube (Google, San Bruno, CA) platform to record listening times.

While most of the 27 responding residents described the length as "about right," 22% (6 of 27) reported that it could be slightly shorter. Only 1 resident requested longer content. This fits well with a 2013 survey of Canadian anesthesiology residents reporting that most would prefer a 5- to 15-minute or a 15- to 30-minute format for educational podcasts, with 5 to 15 minutes being preferred for most topics.[3] A preference for 5- to 15-minute running time was also expressed in another survey by learners outside of GME,[4] and a study of medical students reported that 15 to 20 minutes was the "optimal" length.[5] Our objective data showed that, of those who listen beyond 1 minute, 28% dropped off near the 10-minute mark (FIGURE).

Content may ultimately dictate length, but a good starting aim may be a total length of 10 to 15 minutes.

Many other style and content issues receive a passing mention in the literature. Our survey finds support for dialog being preferred over monolog format (93%, 25 of 27); citation of current evidence (67%, 18 of 27); use of personal anecdotes (52%, 14 of 27); and humor (37%, 10 of 27). Multiple trainees requested summary points, either between sections or at the end. One trainee requested a platform where 1.25× or 1.5× speed was available, consistent with our own listening habits.

As avid listeners and producers of content, we look forward to seeing further scholarship on best practices in podcasting in GME.

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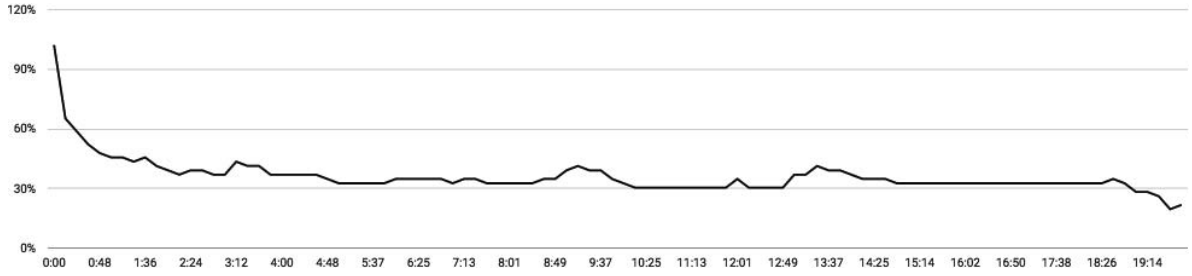

FIGURE
Absolute Audience Retention Reported by YouTube Platform

Note: The absolute audience retention curve shows the number of listens for every moment as a percentage of the total number of listens. Rewinding and relistening by a single listener to the same portion can increase percentage beyond 100%.

DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.4300/JGME-D-17-00015.1

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