



FACULTY OF BRAIN SCIENCES
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Award winning incentive in distance learning

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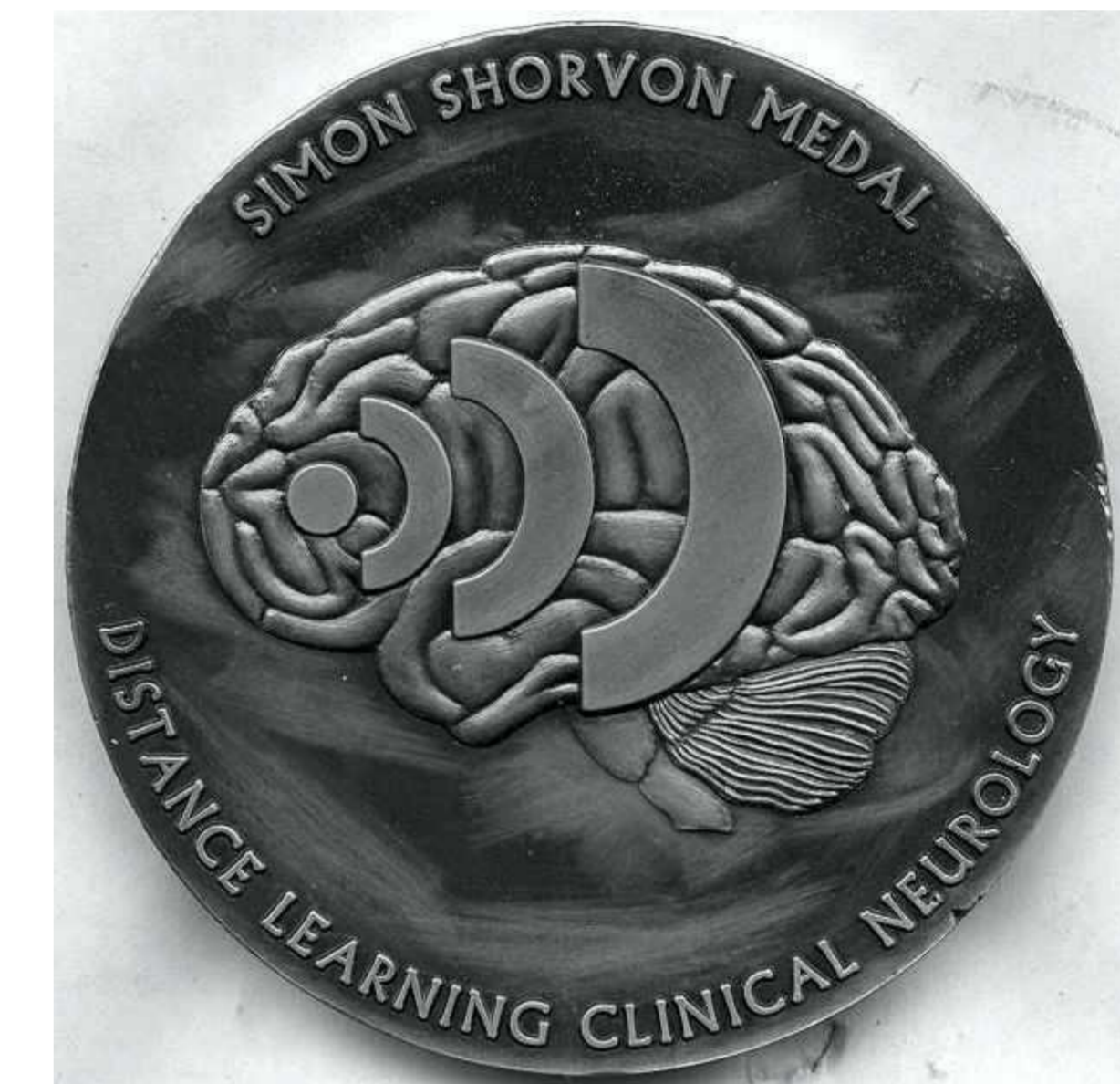
Background: Our distance learning MSc, Diploma and PGCert. course in Clinical Neurology has nearly 100 students world-wide, all of whom are practising physicians. Traditionally there has been poor engagement from students with our course monthly activities. These activities are set and marked by the clinical tutor, and whilst more formative than summative, are taken into account when awarding the final tutor score which makes 20% of the students final mark. Feedback from students has been strongly positive for these activities, but they do take some time to complete. Student participation for the five months after I joined as clinical tutor in 2017 was 44 out of 94 students (47%), comparable to levels before I joined.

Aim: We wished to improve participation, but avoid the draconian approach of heavily penalising students for not participating. Whilst monetary rewards can incentivise, work has suggested that non-monetary awards, especially in the form of a gift or presentation, can be very effective too. We chose to test the benefits of a non-monetary incentive on participation.

Methods: We announced to all students that a non-monetary award would be awarded at the end of each academic year to the student with the best overall results, with particular attention paid to the monthly activity submissions. We named this the Simon Shorvon Medal after a key founder of our course. Participation with the monthly activities was assessed for the five months after this announcement and compared with the five months before. All students on the course were then individually emailed to ascertain student feedback on the Medal.

Results: The number of eligible students was the same before and after the announcement (94). For the five months after the announcement 56 /94 (60%) of students participated, a significant increase compared to pre-medal announcement levels of 47% (Z test $p=0.039$). Of the email feedback received, 92% agreed that the medal was an incentive, agreeing that the prize would be as effective or more so than a monetary one for this.

Conclusions: We have shown that a non-monetary incentive in the form of a medal can significantly increase participation on a distance learning course which had not previously been demonstrated. The medal is still in the process of being produced and so does not physically exist yet, raising the question of whether a 'virtual' medal might be as effective as a physical one for distance learning courses.



Impression of the Simon Shorvon medal