Reviewer's report

Title: Correlations of self-reported knowledge, objective knowledge and preference of medical students for a specialty career: a case-study of youth health care

Version: 5 Date: 27 September 2007

Reviewer: Tim Wilkinson

Reviewer's report:

General

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Major Compulsory Revisions (that the author must respond to before a decision on publication can be reached)

This revised paper is an improvement on the original version and I think now reads much better. There are still some areas that I find confusing to read and it remains quite lengthy. The key message that career preferences aren't always related to prior experiences, or to actual knowledge of the area, remains of significance and potential interest. I think this is really the key message and I would suggest that the paper could be shortened quite considerably to get this method across. This would not only make it more readable, but would give greater emphasis to this important message.

Specific issues:

• The abstract remains slightly obscure as there is no clear definition of “YHC profile” and the definition of objective knowledge also remains slightly hard to understand. I think the conclusion could be made much pithier.

• I would suggest that the 1st paragraph of the background in which Youth Health Physicians are first introduced, that it be made quite clear at this point how this differs from Paediatrics. I suspect this would avoid confusion for new readers who are not familiar with this particular specialty.

• Definition of objective knowledge on Page 5 as the “inverse of the distance between the student’s given YPH profile and the mean YHP profile …” still remains rather confusing as presumably a score of zero is favourable and it does seem to be rather counter intuitive. I would like to see if the authors could develop a measure that may be more easily understandable; for example, a simple percentage of answers that are correct.

• I also found the concept confusing where objective knowledge seems to show a high correspondence with the YHP profile. I thought that the objective knowledge measure was defined as a deviation from the YHP. If this is the case, then clearly correlations cannot be undertaken. If I have become confused about the issue,
then this aspect needs to be much more clearly written.

Minor Essential Revisions (such as missing labels on figures, or the wrong use of a term, which the author can be trusted to correct)
Nil

Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)
Nil

What next?: Accept after minor essential revisions

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Needs some language corrections before being published

Statistical review: Yes, but I do not feel adequately qualified to assess the statistics.

Declaration of competing interests:
I declare that I have no competing interests