Reviewer's report

Title: Peer Role-Play and Standardised Patients in Communication Training: The Student Perspective on Acceptability, Realism, and Effect - A Comparative Study

Version: 1 Date: 23 November 2009

Reviewer: Amy Blue

Reviewer's report:

Major compulsory revisions:

In the introduction and review of literature, the authors write about three other studies comparing standardised patient (SP) and role play (RP) instructional methods. They write these studies have concluded the two methods produce the same skill level of attainment and state the three studies have focused on a single topic. The authors conclude that because the focus on communication skills training was on a single topic, it is difficult to draw conclusions from these previous studies regarding the value of RP or SP in a broader medical context. Thus, they provide the rationale for their work because it is looking at communication skills in a broad range of medical issues. The authors should reconsider the argument for the uniqueness of their work, i.e., students' perceptions and views of the acceptability of SP vs RP. The other studies examined the effectiveness of RP and SP on skill attainment, not students' perceptions. The present study did not examine students' skill attainment, and thus did not answer the question if there is a difference between SP and RP training in student performance in a broader medical context. It is suggested the authors revise their discussion of the broader research context to more accurately portray that the uniqueness of their study is examination of students' perceptions, and not skill attainment (which they acknowledge on page 16 in the further research discussion).

In the section describing the outcomes, the authors should include the wording of the items used for students to rate each outcome rather than simply the outcome concept. (Table 3 provides the exact statements students were provided for rating and the text in the "outcomes" section should include those statements so that the reader clearly understands what was being measured and how.)

Level of interest: An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: Yes, and I have assessed the statistics in my report.

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