Reviewer's report

Title: The effect of preclinical patient contacts on the "shock of practice": a focus group study.

Version: 1 Date: 25 November 2009

Reviewer: John C Mclachlan

Reviewer's report:

1. This is an interesting and well written paper which I am happy to recommend for publication. It seems to be particularly well suited to an online electronic journal. I doubt if even the authors would propose that it is a finding of major significance, yet it remains an interesting contribution to literature in the field. Electronic publication (particularly since it has a qualitative component) will enable it to be accessed readily by a wide range of researchers interested in this particular research area. I identify no major compulsory revisions.

Minor Essential Revisions.

2. One comment relates to the context in which the study was carried out clear. In my own institution patient contact is now frequent in the early years of the programme. It therefore, took me a little while to appreciate the nature of the divide between "pre-clinical" and "clinical" parts of the course being described. The "shock of clinical contact" is therefore less severe for our students. The authors should describe more clearly the amount and nature of patient contact in the 'pre-clinical' component of the course.

3. It is also not clear what degree of responsibility third and fourth year students hold for patient care in the study setting, as opposed to roles as observers or in clerking patients. It would be helpful to clarify this too.

4. In consequence, the authors should identify local variations in the amount of patient contact in the early years (or indeed in later years) as being one of the limitations of their study.

5. Further information on the role of the first moderator (AS) would be helpful. Is Professor Scherpier known to the students as a senior member of staff for instance? Is there likely to be any interaction between his role in the medical school and his role as moderator, in a way which may influence the willingness of students to bring forward opinions?

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

Quality of written English: Acceptable
Statistical review: No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

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