Reviewer's report

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

Version: 1 Date: 2 December 2009

Reviewer: Mandy Moffat

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No major compulsory revisions - an enjoyable and interesting paper. Thank you.

I have some minor essential revisions, mainly rewording for clarification, a couple of suggestions and questions.

Title:
I would change the title – “The effect of” is terminology you might see in a more quantitative study. Perhaps consider changing it to “Do preclinical patient contacts reduce the ‘shock of practice’ for students entering their clinical years? A focus group study” or perhaps a title that reflects the results.

Abstract:
Results, final sentence: Remove the first “in”

Background:
P4, 3rd sentence: Rewording suggestion “Boshuizen [6] highlighted that the “shock of practice”, a crisis experienced by many medical students on first entering the clinical workplace, is marked by a.....”

P4, 2nd paragraph, 1st sentence: I wouldn’t start the sentence of with “Because...” Reword.

P4, 2nd paragraph, 2nd sentence: This sentence is unclear – please make it more explicit/clarify. Are you arguing that it is not the PBL aspect per se that reduces ‘shock of practice’ but early contacts and a vertically integrated curriculum? (not necessarily compulsory in a PBL curriculum?).

P4, 2nd paragraph, last sentence: Move “however” from the end to the start of the sentence e.g. “However, there is as.....”

Methods:
Directly below your heading, please put in a summary sentence or two about your overall design e.g. The design for the current study was qualitative using focus groups.

Context of the study:
2nd sentence: Comma after 2001: “In 2001,”
Research method:
1st sentence: I would restructure a little “We explored students’ perceptions of the transition from ........clinical phase through focus groups.”

Participants:
How many students are there in fourth year?
What was the incentive for participation that students received?

Instruments:
As there is no word limit on the article, it would be nice to see a Prompt Sheet as an appendix.
I would also like you to expand on the second session – how it worked, how much new ground was covered (compared to 1st session) and how much new discussion there was. Were the students given the written reports before the second session?

Results:
General comment. Perhaps consider using text boxes for quotes and then refer to the text boxes within the text? It feels as if the quotes are sometimes just hanging there.

Experiences:
P11, paragraph 1 (not quotes), 3rd sentence: Move “However,” to the start of the sentence rather than have it at the end.

Knowledge and skills:
P14, paragraph 2. Split the sentence in two to help with clarity. E.g. “In general, students felt well prepared with regard to clinical skills, communication skills in particular. However, it was confusing for the students when different doctors......”

Discussion:
P25 final sentence in the discussion. Can you expand on how you would do this? I wonder if future studies could do some comparison between students who have preclinical contact with patients and those who do not. Does this have an impact on only ‘shock of practice’?

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

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

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.