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: Janet Yates

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Qualitative research is not my specialty, but I appreciate its value in exploring the 'softer' side of medical education research and in informing subsequent quantitative studies. I thoroughly enjoyed reading this paper. It is very clearly written, sets the scene well, and gives a good picture of what was done and why. There was a generous use of quotations to illustrate the many themes which were identified within the students' comments. I think that this paper would provide a valuable addition to the literature by exploring the potential value of early patient contact, and it is important now that a wider study is done (as the authors acknowledge) to confirm or refute the findings.

I have some minor essential revisions to suggest:

1) I think the readers should know the stance from which the focus group moderators approached their task; we are told that MG was a 6th year student, but not the professional role of AS, nor of the third author who assisted in the analysis. Perhaps this information could be added to the authorship paragraph rather than in the text.

2) the procedure for data analysis is adequately described but I think it is customary to add the type of analysis, for the benefit of those who are not fully familiar with the techniques used - is this grounded theory?

3) much of the first paragraph of the Participants (p7) should be more correctly placed in the Results section. It would also be good to know how many students were emailed.

4) it is customary for research studies to include a statement of whether ethical permission was required, and if so, which body granted this permission.

Just one discretionary revision - could the actual text of the invitation email be added at the end, or as a supplementary file? The wording could affect the type of student who responded, eg whether a student with particularly strong views might have been encouraged or discouraged from participating.

Otherwise an very well-written paper, thank you.

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.