Reviewer's report

Title: Undergraduate Educational Environment, Perceived Preparedness for Postgraduate Clinical Training, and Pass Rate on the National Medical Licensure Examination in Japan

Version: 2 Date: 12 March 2010

Reviewer: Edward Krupat

Reviewer's report:

I believe that Dr. Takuda and colleagues have been quite responsive to the reviewers' comments in their revision of their manuscript (Undergraduate educational environment…). The paper reads well, and most of the problems identified with the manuscripts have been corrected. However, I still have one serious reservation remaining. The publication of the findings of this national survey could very well have policy-level implications in Japan, and therefore the conclusions drawn should be totally warranted. Although this should be triple-checked with a statistician, it is my understanding that when a variable has a limited range (such as the results of the NMLE, which the authors tell us is reported as pass-fail and has an 85% pass rate), the likelihood of finding strong correlations using this variable is lowered significantly (there is little variance to account for). Although there may be many reasons to be dissatisfied with the NMLE (I don’t know the contents of the exam, but it is likely to test factual knowledge rather than ability to apply it), and there are also many reasons to argue that other forms of exam should be added (such as clinical skills testing), the lack of association between NMLE scores as an outcome and DREEM or perceived preparedness is not in itself to be taken as strong evidence for changing the NMLE. As the authors imply in their cover letter, numerical NMLE scores exist but are not available, but until such a time as the authors can convince those who hold the scores to make them available for research purposes, I am uncomfortable with the last sentence of the introduction (poor association between the pass rate and self-perceived preparedness might suggest a need to consider a national policy change…”

I should note that in response to my comments on the first draft the authors did add a sentence in the Discussion about the lack of association: “This may reflect relative insensitivity for identifying any association between the NMLE and perceived preparedness when using data about pass rate.” However, this one sentence never explains why the pass rate is likely to be an insensitive indicator, nor does it at all recognize that if it is an insensitive indicator then the weight behind those conclusions is limited. The bottom line is that I still think that this can and should be published. Most of the conclusions, about perceived preparedness, about the educational environment, etc are well justified by the data, and are important. However, given their potential importance, its conclusions about the utility of the NMLE should be expressed with greater detail and moderation because they rely on NMLE pass-fail rates.
Level of interest: An article of outstanding merit and interest in its field

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.