Reviewer's report

Title: What is the impact of a national postgraduate medical specialist reform on the daily clinical training? A survey.

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Reviewer: David J Hillis

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What is the impact of a national postgraduate medical specialist reform on the daily clinical training? A survey.

1. Is the question posed by the authors well defined?

The question raised and its analysis to site of training, specialties concerned and the impact of training in learning and teaching is very important. There have been many changes in the approach to education particularly with greater focus on understanding competencies. It is critical the delivery of these is thoroughly reviewed. The step beyond this is to have a better understanding of the quality of the outcome achieved ie are we producing better clinicians. This study limits itself largely to process measures which are highly valid but does not attempt to answer the larger question of clinician quality.

The abstract refers to improving quality and efficiency of the education. The pedagogic initiatives have more specifically addressed effectiveness as they rarely have a specific discussion about resources utilised. (Discretionary)

2. Are the methods appropriate and well described?

The construct of the questionnaire appears to have appropriate and has been compared to the Postgraduate Educational Environment Measure (PHEEM). The distribution and follow up is well detailed.

3. Are the data sound?

The analysis of the data appears to be appropriate. However a statistician’s review would be appropriate.

Within the results (Table 1, 2, 3), I could not see the data relevant to the increase in people attending the train the trainers course. (Noted to have increased) There is a fair amount of discussion relating to this without data representation. The involvement of clinicians at all levels in training is one of key recommendations. I believe it needs to be more supported by data. (Major)
In the assessment of the data in Table 2, the presentation is of medians with a percentile range. There is obviously much more statistical analysis within each category for the conclusion of significant changes being achieved. I could not see the evidence of change for the questions about use of personal learning plans, use of clinical situations or knowing each other. Maybe this should be presented if key discussion is made of these points. (Major)

In the discussion section, fourth paragraph, the comment is of a “mean” and not “median”. This will need to be clarified (Minor)

Between table 2 and table 3 the first question is stated as “Are you meeting for educational appraisal meetings” to “What is the value of the educational appraisal meeting”. What is the correct wording or were they different? (Minor)

4. Does the manuscript adhere to the relevant standards for reporting and data deposition?

I would prefer to have the additional data that supports the attendance at courses in a table and also the further analysis behind the key findings of significance in table 2 and 3. The conclusions would appear to be valid. (Major)

5. Are the discussion and conclusions well balanced and adequately supported by the data?

Within the paper there is an assumption that the trainers are receiving specific training. This does not appear to be detailed. There would be some value in this being briefly outlined. The reason for this is that a specific initiative by the National Board of Health was to have junior doctors attend mandatory courses on communication skills, learning and teaching and management. How does this differ to the other courses that the trainers were undertaken? Or were they the same? (Major)

The conclusions / recommendations are in two streams. At the research level there is the qualitative assessment of this area with focus groups or departmental based case studies. At an implementation level it is the increased and perhaps mandatory involvement of senior trainers in the courses and improving the educational culture. Both of these are supported from the survey.

Another recommendation not discussed is how the parameters of this survey if sufficiently validated can be used in funding or accreditation discussions, such as funding is made available when total compliance with undertaking training of all staff and the completion of in-training-assessments is achieved. (Discretionary)

6. Are limitations of the work clearly stated?

Yes

7. Do the authors clearly acknowledge any work upon which they are building, both published and unpublished?
Yes, the referencing is appropriate.

8. Do the title and abstract accurately convey what has been found?

The title is appropriate. I have raised questions about the use of the word efficiency or effectiveness in the abstract. Given the limited amount of resources available for teaching I believe it is raising the effectiveness of that teaching. (Discretionary)

9. Is the writing acceptable?

Yes

**Level of interest:** An article of importance 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.