Reviewer’s report

Title: The views of doctors in their first year of medical practice on the lasting impact of a preparation for house officer course they undertook as final year medical students

Version: 1 Date: 30 December 2009

Reviewer: Edward Finnerty

Reviewer’s report:

This report represents a study of the assessment of a ‘transition’ program for newly graduated physicians immediately prior to beginning their clinical training. One of the major strengths of the study is that it assesses the knowledge gained from the program several months after the individuals have had the opportunity to use that knowledge and gained practical experience as physicians.

This report does add useful information to the field of medical education, particularly in the design of educational interventions for the transition from formal education and training in medical school to the more informal and less structured post-graduate medical training (residency). I was most interested in description of the course and the finding of the student’s perceptions of the program.

The author’s defined their question as the perceptions of year 1 House Officers to a preparatory course taken at the end of the medical school year. The design of the study was to use an electronic survey questionnaire sent to 90 students approximately 9 months after the preparatory course. The study subjects were randomly selected from a pool consisting of half the graduates from the medical school and balanced to represent the primary teaching hospitals and general district hospitals associated with the school. They had a good response rate (84%). The survey included a series of statements using a Likert scale for the response and several open-ended questions. The analysis of the more quantitative Likert responses appears appropriate. The authors indicated they used a ‘constant comparative’ method for the qualitative free responses. Representative examples were given in the body of the manuscript to indicate the types of responses. This study is essentially an observational study in the sense that no hypothesis testing is required no performed. The data presentation is consistent and appropriate for this type of study.

The results are presented in a fashion to support the conclusions and in fact do support the conclusions drawn. The discussion with relevant literature is good.

All in all, this is an interesting study and worthy of consideration for publication.

There are a number of issues I would like to see the authors address, some of these are related to language style, so I will defer to the editor and the authors on the final decision regarding these particular items (Minor Essential Revisions).
Some others are more fundamental (Major Compulsory) and I would very much like to see them addressed before a final decision on acceptance is made.

Major compulsory revisions:

1. P. 2 Abstract, Background (ln 1): It is customary to not include citations or references in the abstract.
2. P. 2 Abstract, last line (programme of taught elements): a brief description of the content of the course is needed.
3. P. 2 Abstract, Methods, 2nd sentence: do not begin a sentence with a number (76), spell it out.
4. P. 2 Abstract, Results: This section needs reworded to provide more information as to the actual results.
5. P.2 Abstract, Conclusions: No data relating to a comparison with immediate impact of the program is presented, so not sure that this conclusion can be made as such. I do believe a rewording is necessary, there are legitimate conclusion that can be drawn.
6. P. 3 In 6: Since many readers will be from other than the UK, some clarification of what is meant by a ‘Foundation School’ is needed.
7. P. 3, ln 12-16: These two last sentences refer to the reports of Evans and Berridge. Their work appears related to this study and a description is given, but no findings of the studies. This should be included.
8. P. 3, ln 17 and 19: The acronym ‘PRHO’ is used, this needs a definition with first use.
9. P. 3, ln 21: The sentence is fine, simply does not need to include ‘76 questionnaires’ as that belongs in the methods section.
10. P. 4, Methods, ln 10: the term ‘struck off’ needs to be defined.
11. P. 6, Results, ln 7: Authors report the 15% of the FY1 responded with ‘did not know’, looking at Table 1 this appears to be 14%. I assume rounding is responsible for the difference, but since only whole numbers are displayed, the numbers need to match.
12. P. 6, Results, ln 9. The last sentence of the paragraph states the positive and negative framing of the question shows a near perfect correlation. Examination of Table 1 reveals a 56-69% and a 19-31% relation for agreement/disagreement of the two forms of the questions. This does not appear to be a highly consistent pattern and certainly not one that would indicate a near perfect correlation. Did the authors perform a correlation analysis of the responses? If so what is the ‘r’ value?
13. P. 6, last paragraph of Results (ln 17-20): Paragraph refers to responses to a question of what they did in the taught course should have been in the shadowing sessions. This material is not included in Table 1 and should be.
14. P. 7, ln 1: the term ‘underlined’ is used first here, then throughout the shadowing section of the results. I understood that the qualitative section of the
questionnaire was composed of open ended questions. If so, then the responses would have been ‘free text’ and not cued or selections from a list of choices. The term underlined would imply that there were in fact choices associated with each question item for the respondents to select. I believe the authors are intending to simply state that the respondents identified and reported these themes. The term ‘underlined’ should not be used, rather another word selection conveying a clearer meaning is called required.

15. P. 10, Discussion ln 6: The statement is that the relationship with the outgoing F1 accounted for 2% who strongly agreed or agreed… How was the ‘relationship’ with the outgoing F1 assessed? There was no mention in the methods or anywhere else in the paper of an assessment of the relationship between the outgoing and incoming F1. What is the basis for this statement?

16. P. 13, Conclusion, ln 1-7. This paragraph refers to the limitations, and in particular the ‘did not respond’ or ‘did not know’ responses. The authors draw the conclusion that this reflects a problem of recall. This is a legitimate and appropriate conclusion. I would offer that another possibility could be a lack of ability on the part of the respondents to prioritize the elements, thus they simply lumped all together and simply left the response blank or marked ‘did not know’. The important aspect is that the large number (percentage) of these responses is a limitation to the study and they are difficult to assess.

Minor Essential Revisions:

1. Throughout the paper the authors refer to a programme of ‘taught elements’ or the ‘taught part’. This terminology is troubling to me. It would imply that the shadowing experience is different and does not include any ‘teaching’ as this was not the ‘taught’ part. I would suggest a different term. In place of the ‘taught’ term use ‘didactic’. I believe the authors are using the term “taught” to refer to a classroom experience, which would be a more traditional didactic teaching/learning experience.

2. P. 4, ln 3. The last sentence in the paragraph incorporates 9 citations. That is a lot of support for 1 sentence. These references include a wide range of studies all relating to the theme of the paper. Maybe more discussion of this work would be beneficial. This discussion could occur here in the Introduction or in the Discussion section and relate the findings of this study to these other studies.

3. P. 3, ln 9 & 17. Jones et al. [13] (2006). I understand there are two Jones in the reference list (#4 and #13) with different publication dates. Is it necessary to include the year and the reference number? I would imagine the reference number in the citation should be sufficient to identify which article is being referenced.

4. P. 4, Methods, ln 11: GP might need to be defined.

5. p. 4, Methods, ln 15-16: the ‘2’ should be spell out as ‘two’. I understand that the two hospitals related to Nottingham Medical School would be identified as ‘teaching hospitals’ but if the others, general district hospitals, are providing experiences for physicians in training, then wouldn’t they also be ‘teaching hospitals’. I do not fully understand the distinction. More clarification might be
helpful.
6. P. 6 and on, Shadowing section of the results: in discussing the results of the qualitative open-ended questions, leading the paragraph with the question might provide a clearer organization to the discussion.
7. P. 8, ln 1: might include a definition of HO, I assume it refers to house officer.
8. P. 10, ln 9: might be helpful to define ‘obs’ in “…look at the obs chart, …”

**Level of interest:** An article of importance in its field

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

**Statistical review:** Yes, and I have assessed the statistics in my report.

**Declaration of competing interests:**

'I declare that I have no competing interests'