Reviewer's report

Title: Discrimination against International Medical Graduates in the U.S. Residency Program Selection Process

Version: 2 Date: 26 July 2009

Reviewer: Rodney Crutcher

Reviewer's report:

This is an interesting, important, challenging and disturbing article. It is well written. It contains strong opinion based on limited empirical data. The authors searched for data to investigate their concerns - there was little research-based data to find in the PubMed literature. The authors have handled what data there is (2 studies - one in family medicine and one is psychiatry, and a survey of surgery program directors) skillfully.

I have reviewed the literature search strategy. It seems reasonable. I would have thought there would have been more published data relevant to the authors inquiry. I wonder if a biomedical librarian might have been able to find additional relevant literature. I am unsure, of course, and am prepared to accept what the authors have discovered as 'the state of the published known'.

All involved in this territory will be aware of many complexities and biases that can and do 'creep in' at all stages of the admissions process. Much of the thinking and practice - and robust evidence - if and where it exists - never gets published. There is much more opinion than data.

I understand in response to initial reviews the authors have subsequently provided a more detailed search strategy and have also made additions and revisions to the Results and Discussion. I anticipate these changes will strengthen what is already a good manuscript.

Compulsory Revisions - None.

There are some Minor Essential Revisions. The most important is the use of terminology. While the tile uses the phrase '..Selection Process', in the manuscript most of the text refers recruitment. Which is it? Are they different? Does it matter?

By way of my own bias and with some knowledge of Admissions Literature, I view recruitment as one stage of the selection process. If the evaluative process is rigorous, and program entry competitive, it may not be so important; with weaker evaluative processes, or a less competitive program, recruitment can be more important. In the real world of admissions / selection decision making, both matter. There is a natural tension between recruitment and rigorous selection procedures. Perhaps the authors could add a sentence or two to say something about their approach and biases here. While some of this is self evident - given
the tone of the text - greater clarity would help.

Some minor copy editing is required. I will not give examples save one - in the abstract there is reference to both the 'recruiting process' and also 'recruitment process'. I believe 'recruitment process' works best.

The limitations of this study need further comment. The opinions here are based on very limited data, but - I note - much medical education experience among the authorship team. The surface of what may be really known has been barely scratched here. A search of the grey literature may have yielded more data (or at least more information) but the chances of finding robust empirical data in this literature are small.

Discretionary Revision / Comment

While there is a need for more study in this territory, it is a difficult area to investigate. Qualitative approaches might be very helpful to better understand what may be going on. The authors could refer to the use of this methodology as being potentially useful.

As we all know, this is 'messy' territory. And what happens - or doesn't happen - clearly reflects our biases and implicit or explicit policy at many levels. As the authors indicate, societal engagement and thoughtful discussion and debate - and refined policy direction - is required. The authors work - if published - has the potential to contribute to this engagement.

Thank you for the opportunity to review this manuscript.

R Crutcher M.D.

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

**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.