Reviewer's report

Title: Introducing an online community into a clinical education setting: a pilot study of student and staff engagement and outcomes using blended learning

Version: 1 Date: 15 September 2009

Reviewer: Linda Lewin

Reviewer's report:

Review: Introducing an online community into a clinical education setting: a pilot study of student and staff engagement and outcomes using blended learning

Reviewer: Linda Orkin Lewin, MD

1. Is the question posed by the authors well defined?
The question is not stated clearly in this manuscript.

2. Are the methods appropriate and well described? The methods are likely appropriate, but they are not well described in the methods section. The “design based research methodology” used was not described, and although it is referenced it would be helpful to have had a brief description for those who are not familiar with that method. Also, the statistical methods used to analyze student outcomes was not included in the Methods section but comes up for the first time in the Results section. Overall, the Methods sections does not describe, in a linear fashion, the way that the study was conducted from beginning to end.

3. Are the data sound? Some of the data are sound, but much of it is very limited and not reported in a clear way. The students’ marks on the workshops are clear, but all of the opinions of students and staff using the community have such small numbers of responses that it is hard to know what they mean.

4. Does the manuscript adhere to the relevant standards for reporting and data deposition? The data is mostly presented in a text format and is limited in quantity.

5. Are the discussion and conclusions well balanced and adequately supported by the data? The discussion is a bit rambling, and includes some methods that belong in the methods section. The majority of the conclusions point to issues involved in creating such an online community and getting people to use it, and those are valid and supported by the data presented.

6. Are the limitations of the work clearly stated? Yes.

7. Do the authors clearly acknowledge and work upon which they are building? Yes.

8. Do the title and abstract accurately convey what has been found? The title is fine; the abstract is not very well written and is not really clear.

9. Is the writing acceptable? No, it is not. The manuscript is poorly organized and
the information is not presented clearly.

Major compulsory revisions:
Please state the exact purpose of the study clearly at the end of the background section.
Please review the methods and results section to make sure that you outline exactly what you did and in what order when you performed this study (Methods) and then only report the results of each step, in the same order as they are described, in the Results section.

**Level of interest:** An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

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

**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'