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: 3 Date: 30 November 2009

Reviewer: Linda Lewin

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Comments in order of the paper (noted as major, minor, or discretionary):

1. In several places in the introduction and methods sections the authors refer to information in their references by just using the reference number (for example on page 4 they write, "The importance of the communication components of e-learning in clinical settings is highlighted by (4)). This is found again on page 5 in the first paragraph and on page 10. It would be better to refer to use the names of the authors of those references (example: ... is highlighted in work by DeWever, et al (4)). These are minor revisions related to style, not substance.

2. In the Methods section the online resource described is refered to as "the research site;" it would be nice to state what it was actually called. This is a minor revision.

3. In the Methods section there is no list of the topics included in the lectures that this online resource was enhancing. Any interested reader would want to know the content of this course. This is a compulsory revision.

4. In the Methods section the authors say that they wanted to address whether the online portion of the course enhanced, compromised, or had no effect on the students learning, but they don't say what questions they were asked or how the analysis was done. This is compulsory.

5. On page 18 there is some information about how groups were compared on their standard evaluation measures; this is methods not results. Describing this should be in the methods section. Compulsory.

6. There are too many tables and figures that don't really tell the reader anything important. Only include those that present information that is critical to understanding the results and that are better understood from a table/figure than from text. Compulsory.

7. Overall, this is much better organized than the first version, but some problems with the methods section remain as detailed above. My take on the lesson from this paper is that it is difficult to implement an online learning community for a course like this and that the usage and acceptability were only fair. The usefulness in reading this for others would be in understanding what the challenges were and what the authors would recommend to make it work better for others who want to do the same thing. This paper is too long and gives too
much detail for the amount of impact; I want to know what kind of course this was to start with, how the online community was supposed to work, how much it was used, how the users felt about it, and if there are any educational outcomes that could be reported. Then I would want a list of things to keep in mind if I wanted to do the same thing.

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

**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.