Reviewer's report

Title: Exploring teaching approaches in supervision of medical students: an ethnographic study

Version: 1 Date: 11 June 2009

Reviewer: Anna Chur-Hansen

Reviewer's report:

This is an interesting paper on an important topic. I have some suggestions for ways in which the paper might be improved, for you to consider.

Major Compulsory Revisions

1. The conclusions you draw are not all supported by the data. You identified seven pedagogical approaches, and the evidence for these can be seen. However, you also conclude that all supervisors you observed used all of the approaches, but this is not clear from your results. In addition, you conclude that supervisors choose from their repertoire based on the gender/knowledge/attitude of the student, but that is not clear from the data presented in the results. I understand that in a qualitative study such as this a large amount of information is generated. Perhaps you are trying to squeeze too much into one paper? Perhaps there are three separate papers here?

2. In the background you do not distinguish between "supervisor" and "supervision" and "teacher" and "teaching". What is the difference? Are there differences?

3. For readers outside of Sweden you need to give more information about the students in terms of how they come to be in the medicine course. Are they postgraduates? I am guessing from the ages that they are, but this should be made explicit, as it is relevant to teaching methods. Is the 4th year the final year?

4. Please delete the entire section in the Methods about the other papers you have submitted or prepared. It is not convention to include this material in a publication.

5. An important aspect of qualitative research is reflexivity. For example, how the researchers are located within the context of the study. So, who are the researchers? Are they from medical backgrounds? Did their presence impact behaviour?

6. Observations are clearly explained in the Results, but there is nothing about the interviews. As per point 1 above, perhaps you have tried to cover too much?

7. The implications of your findings are not based in the literature or in evidence, but are suppositions. This is problematic. Drawing each of the seven approaches to the literature in medical and health professional education would possibly be a better way to go.
Minor Essential Revisions

1. There are some minor typos e.g. in the Abstract, sentence 1 of Methods.
2. It is unclear who "representatives from Health Care" are. This needs explanation.
3. All of the data in Figure 1 are presented in the paper, so this Figure is redundant.
4. Lecturing - perhaps this might be better called "didactic teaching"?
5. "catch a phenomenon" - this does not make sense.

Level of interest: An article of limited interest

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'