Reviewer's report

Title: Evaluating professionalism in medical undergraduates using selected response questions: findings from an item response modelling study

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Reviewer: Anthony O'Sullivan

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This interesting study attempts to assess professionalism in medical students using selected response questions. This is an important area which needs further research. A cross-sectional study was performed using assessment undertaken from a few cohorts of early year medical students. They compared selected response questions (SRQs) with other measures of professionalism such as the Conscientious Index. Essentially they found that SRQs did not correlate with their other measures of professionalism, therefore making them poor discriminators of knowledge of professionalism. This is an interesting study however, the findings are not surprising as professionalism is such a complex construct made up of many components and behaviours (1) that knowledge of professional behaviour is just a small part. Knowledge of how to conduct a clinical examination does not infer that the person could conduct the clinical examination (2).

Major comments

1. There does not appear to be a clear hypothesis or aims stated.
2. The methods should start with the study design. There is no need to have the dates that the cohorts attempted these examinations, this can be summarized just as cohorts.
3. The reason for including the “Conscientious Index” needs to be expanded upon.
4. Some details from the first paragraph of the results can be included in the methods section.
5. Its seems counter-intuitive that the Conscientious Index which seems to be a measure of professionalism correlated better with the anatomy questions than the questions on professionalism. This is discussed well in the discussion.
6. A large part of the results is very technical so the authors may need to interpret more what their findings are appearing to represent instead of leaving it for the discussion.
7. Were there any sex differences in their findings?

Minor Comments

1. In the abstract the font appears smaller in the methods.
2. The grammar in the last line of the introduction is not correct.
3. In the last paragraph on page 6 there is a citation error.


Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

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.