Reviewer's report

Title: Australian medical students' perceptions of role models and realism in medical television programs

Version: 1 Date: 15 February 2011

Reviewer: Joanna MacDonald

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Major Compulsory Revisions

1. Methods-this section of the paper needs considerable attention. The method is clearly adapted and closely follows that of Czarny et al (as attributed by the authors). However it falls short of those authors’ thoroughness in a number of areas:
   • It is not clear how the participants completed the survey, when or where
   • As the purpose is particularly to explore national (Australian) factors, some explanation of the differences between medical training in USA and Australia would help
   • A copy of the survey should be appended
   • As the survey has been altered, some consideration to the validity of doing this should be given
   • The Professional Identity scale should be appended and its scientific validity clarified
   • How the data were stored needs to be explained

2. Results-this section also needs considerable attention. I infer that there is to be a companion publication, in which case making that more explicit and clarifying what data will be in that might help the reader. The following areas need to be addressed in my opinion:
   • The first para needs to also detail the response rate as a percentage of the total number of students
   • Tables 2 and 3 need clarification as to how the criteria from the survey instruments have been collapsed to provide the categories in the tables
   • The demographics in Table 1 list a lot of data that are not used subsequently (eg language spoken at home). The N should be listed as well as %ages for ease of reading
   • There is no analysis to tell the reader how typical these students are of Australian medical students
   • Table 2 is difficult to understand. The relationship to the accompanying text (on P 5 under “medias show students watch”) is unclear to me, as is the meaning of “*watched occasionally, less than once a week and more than once a week”.
• I find it surprising that the numbers in the columns describing whether students watch alone or with others add up to 100% as I would expect them to vary in this ie sometimes do one and sometimes the other
• Although significance levels are referred to, there are no analyses of the significance of these data. They are treated as purely descriptive
• Para 2 on p 6 refers to students’ opinions of the depictions of professionalism, but does not state how many students made such ratings. That it is less than 100% is suggested by the phrase “of students who recalled…”.
• A table would be helpful to portray the perceived accuracy of depiction of ethical issues.
• The last sentence of the section on ethical issues needs to be reworded
• The section on professional identity and gender fails to address the issue of whether there is any discernible relationship between PI and TV watching etc, other than for ER.
• Scores on the PI scale are meaningless without more explanation and discussion of the scale

Minor Essential Revisions
1. The Discussion makes good points and reads well in general. It would be strengthened by:
• Better contextualising it in terms of explaining and exploring the differences in medical training in USA and Australia as this may account for some of the differences
• Exploring the issue of the difference between beliefs about being influenced and being influenced-this is classically seen in research on the influence of pharmaceutical companies, in which doctors invariably claim not to be influenced despite the overwhelming evidence that they are.
• The paragraph on extension beyond the classroom seems to be going beyond the data and this study and does not add to the paper
2. The conclusion should be worded more tentatively-the study suggests that medical TV programs may have some pedagogical value-it does not show it.
3. The title is slightly misleading in that the study does not clearly deal with role models. I would suggest that including ethical issues or professionalism in the title might be more accurate.
4. The Abstract refers to comparison of groups, which is only apparent to me in the section on PI. It also refers to students discussing ethical issues with friends, which I cannot find in the results-although they did seek advice from friends.

Discretionary Revisions
1. References-the references to the American Journal of Bioethics need to include the issue, as each of its 12 annual issues starts at page 1.
**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