Reviewer’s report

Title: Self-assessment of intercultural communication skills: a survey of physicians and medical students in Geneva, Switzerland

Version: 1 Date: 13 July 2011

Reviewer: Catherine Matheson

Reviewer’s report:

Major compulsory revisions

1. Introduction, second paragraph: the term resident is used without explanation and is hence confusing. It needs to be made clear that the writers are referring to hospital residents [i.e. speciality trainees] and not residents of Geneva / Switzerland.

2. Introduction third paragraph: the term non-Francophone needs clarification and explanation.

3. Methods first paragraph: the writers need to explain how their random sample was arrived at, i.e. what method of randomisation was used and whether the sample was stratified. If stratified, then by what measures. If the sample was not stratified, this needs to be explained.

4. Methods: the writers are unclear as to whether the questionnaire was anonymous. If so, how was this ensured and how could non-responders then be chased? If it was not anonymous, what impact did this have on the response rate and what account have the writers taken of this?

5. Methods: a copy of the questionnaire in French needs to be included. There is much scope for drift between French and English and the reader should be able to judge whether / to what extent this has occurred.

6. Methods: why was ethnicity not asked for? This could have been according to the categories of the Federal Offices of Statistics or simply self-reported by respondents.

7. Methods: why were respondents not asked whether they were Suisse romand of origin or whether they belonged to any of the other Swiss national language groups?

8. Methods: why was native language or language of scholarity of respondents not asked? If it was asked, this needs to be reported. If not asked, the absence needs explanation.

9. Results: what proportion of respondents were of urban/rural Swiss origin?

10. Results: which ANOVA was used? Which tests of linear trend were used and
why?

Minor essential revisions

1. Abstract Methods section: there is mention of a larger study. It would be helpful to know more about this and what it entailed. In the Methods section, medical student should be plural.

2. In the Results, the writers need to distinguish between intercultural practical skills and intercultural communications skills. They need thereby make clear in what respect communications skills are not practical in their sense of the latter term.

3. Discussion first paragraph: the ‘relatively low response rate’ is not an issue if the sample is stratified and this is taken into account in the analysis and reporting. The literature on market research cites a rate of 10-15% as typical of emailed surveys.

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: Yes, and I have assessed the statistics in my report.

Declaration of competing interests:

I declare that I have no competing interests