Reviewer’s report

Title: Key challenges in simulated patient programs: An international comparative case study

Version: 1 Date: 19 July 2011

Reviewer: Win May

Reviewer’s report:

This descriptive research of simulated patient programs in four countries is an important and much-needed piece of work as these four programs are not only in different parts of the world but also have different institutional characteristics.

The questions posed by the authors are well-defined, and the methods appropriate and well-described. The data is sound, based on the both primary and secondary sources. The manuscript adheres to the relevant standards for reporting and data disposition. The limitations are clearly stated, and the authors acknowledged the work of previous authors.

The title of the paper promises to deliver the challenges faced by SP programs. Yet it was difficult to extract from the article, the exact nature of the challenges. For example, in the first challenge: “Challenges associated with simulated patients in programs”, the first sub-category is Recruitment. From the text, the reviewer assumes that the challenge is “Not being able to find enough SPs”, as having oversubscription does not seem to be a challenge. The authors then continue with a description of recruitment strategies at the different institutions. Likewise in the second sub-category of Performance, the challenge would be “Ability to evaluate and remediate SP performance”, as the authors then go on to describe what is being done at two institutions.

The challenges are hinted at, but not explicitly defined, except in the category of “Challenges associated with faculty in SP programs”, where the challenge is specified as “faculty development.”

There is a need to explicitly state the challenges for each category. Maybe the authors can come up with the explicit challenges in the Conclusion.

Overall, a well-written piece of work.

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

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.