Reviewer's report

Title: Student feedback on the use of paintings in Sparshanam, the Medical Humanities module at KIST Medical College, Nepal

Version: 1 Date: 10 November 2010

Reviewer: Johanna Shapiro

Reviewer’s report:

An interesting article that makes a valuable contribution to medical humanities literature.

Major Compulsory Revisions

The Discussion is insufficiently focused. Please revise and try to make your points more crisply.

The opening paragraph is a good summary.

The next paragraph (p. 12) does not seem all that relevant.

Next is a point about low male participation in the study – interesting, but should go toward the end of the Discussion section (gender is not a main focus of the study). Then you talk about how some painting were hard to interpret, followed by a discussion of which painting were too ambiguous. This is much too detailed for a discussion of this point. A better discussion would focus on why interpretation of art is difficult for medical students.

The final sentence in that para (p. 13) seems unrelated to the topic of difficulty of interpreting, and should be a concluding sentence of the Discussion section.

I do not understand the purpose of including information about visiting the nyu website. Unless this is made clearer, I would simply eliminate this finding from both the Results and the Discussion.

The next paragraph (p. 13, last para) might make a good concluding paragraph to the Discussion section.

The para p. 14 starts off with a topic sentence about creating a story, but the real topic sentence is “The major advantage…” The point about writing stories and poems about the paintings is an interesting one, but should go later in the Discussion, and should be the sole focus of its own paragraph.

The discussion about paintings from Nepal and Nepalese artists was EXCELLENT. Clear and well-stated – use this as a model for your other discussion points!

The sentence beginning “The median scores as regards…” should be deleted; it adds nothing to what is presented in the results. Perhaps when you are discussing low male participation, you could note that there were no gender differences on the quantitative questions. I would note the overall high scores (again, I’d recommend using mean, not median, for greater precision) in that
opening paragraph of the Discussion section.

To Limitations, please add that the biggest limitation is that it was a single institution study. The response rate is actually pretty good.

Minor Essential Revisions

Further attention to language needs to be taken, perhaps a review by a native English speaker. Examples:

Abstract – Background: lines 2-5, subject-verb agreement (same issue p. 5)

Abstract – Results: line 3, rewrite “…were helped students feel what they saw” (same issue p. 9)

P. 6 – line 5, should be “As in…”

P. 7 – para 1, line 2: should read “Authors explained the objectives of the study to students who were then invited to participate.”

P. 7 – para 2 – phrases should probably be separate by semi-colons; middle of paragraph, “Whether” should be decapitalized and incorporated into the list

P. 9 – last line: “Those who responded yes to this question…”

P. 10 – para 1, line 1: “… shows painting with which participants could identify the most and cites reasons given”; line 5: “.. it was difficult to interpret…”; should be a new paragraph starting with “Forty-one students…”; new paragraph starting “Table 2…”

P. 11 – line 1: “suggestion was that…”

P. 14 – line 2: remember to keep discussion of Results in the past tense (“two activities which helped…”

Other Revisions

I urge use of subheads, particularly in the Results section, where there are a lot of interesting results, but the reader could benefit from more direction in making one’s way through them.

P. 4 - Please state the meaning of “Sparshanam”

P. 6 – Please put the list of paintings in tabular form

P. 7 – Please explain why “method of financing” is significant, especially since almost all students were self-financed; or omit this information. Are you trying to make a point about socioeconomic status of the students? If so this should be clarified, and then noted in the Discussion. You do not use this information in any of your analyses, so it is not clear why it is important.

Similarly, clarify why it was important for students to have visited the nyu data-base. Was this a suggestion made to the students? What do you think it meant that students either did or did not visit the site?

P 11 – last para: Please add “There were no differences based on sex of respondents.” Table 4 – Rather than (or in addition to) the median scores, please report means and standard deviations
P. 12 – 3rd para, lines 1-3: Please speculate on why you think male medical students were less likely to participate in the study than females. The explanation as stands does not seem gender-based.

P. 11-12 3rd para, lines 4-II: These didn’t seem to fit in this paragraph, and in any case are at a level of detail too specific for a discussion. I’d suggest omitting.

P 12 – para 1: As per above, I didn’t grasp the relevance of information about visiting the nyu database. Please make this clearer, or simply omit this finding and its discussion.

In all tables (where relevant), please cite both number and percentage of participants. Table 4, please use means and standard deviations; also please include N for each group (male and female)

Discretionary Revisions

The literature review is thorough, although you could also cite Shapiro, Rucker, and Beck, Training the Clinical Eye and Mind, Medical Education, 2006, 40(3):263-8.

P. 6 – Consider giving a couple of examples of how the groups were named

P. 8 – first line: maybe insert an “also” for clarity

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