Reviewer’s report

Title: Does doctors’ workload impact supervision and ward activities of final-year students?

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Reviewer: Berit Eika

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Introduction:
The paper addresses a common problem: the balance between patient care and education, although the suggested problem of students being exploited for non-medical activities is unknown to me. The aim of the study: to test the commonly held opinion that patient work load might influence education negatively, is highly relevant. The authors in their design chose to keep history taking and physical examination exempt from the study. It is difficult to understand this argument, as this is the very core that medical students should learn and therefore be supervised on.

Methods: Two variables were combined and thus critical to the study: activities and workload. Several questions result from reading the manuscript, especially to these variables:

Activities recorded by the students:
- Is the difference between medical – and non-medical activities always clear-cut. As I see them described, some of the non-medical activities might have educational implications, have a function of socializing the students into the department, or providing them with an opportunity to learn about other health care personnel.

- How was the diary constructed? Did all activities fit into the diary? How was it made sure that the students filled out the diary correctly?

- The scale used is intuitively logical but were there mixes, i.e. performing a procedure independently but getting feedback afterwards?

- The authors chose to count activities but were differences in workload between activities accounted for?

Workload index:
- This index was constructed on the basis of informal interviews. How was the index validated and reliability assured?

- One could imagine that the perception of workload also had an individual component. How was this accounted for?
Other specific remarks concern:

- Resident’s motivation to teach: how was it measured?

- In the result section, “actively performed activity” is a variable: does this comprise everything: observing, assisting, and performing? Also the variable “qualified” activity is used: is this all medical activities?

- Discussion: presents data/results first time which confuses reading (i.e. data on student satisfaction)

Overall judgment of the manuscript is that is addresses a highly relevant question and that it systematically and well accounts for how things were done. The problems in the manuscript stem from the overall design. First, student activities should be thought through and the underlying distinction between non-medical, medical, and history related activities should be thought better through as should the validity and reliability of the measurement instrument (= the diary). Second, the validity and reliability aspects of the workload index instrument needs careful consideration. Finally, reflections should be done when it comes to the character of the relationship between index and student activities: is it causal or???

In conclusion, this manuscript need major, compulsory revisions if it has to meet publication requirements.

Declaration of competing interests:

I declare that I have no competing interests