Reviewer’s report

Title: Comparative cross-sectional study of empathy among first year and final year medical students in Jimma University, Ethiopia: Steady state of the heart and opening of the eyes

Version: 1 Date: 2 April 2012

Reviewer: Gary Rogers

Reviewer’s report:

This study adds to the existing literature on the important topic of empathy development in medical students in that it presents data from an African country and attempts to differentiate between the 'emotional' and 'cognitive' aspects of empathy in a way that most studies from the developed world have not.

It states its research question clearly at the end of the Background section and its methodology is broadly appropriate for answering that question, although its cross-sectional rather than longitudinal design limits validity somewhat and this is not appropriately acknowledged in the paper.

The paper's contribution is also somewhat limited by the decision not to include the Jefferson scale as one of the measures, since this is the main instrument used in studies with which it might usefully be compared. The Jefferson scale has its limitations and it may have been quite appropriate not to use it in this study but, if this is the case, then the paper should clearly spell out the reasons for that decision.

I have some concerns about the number of variables that have been investigated for an association with the main outcome measures, without at least a consideration of adjusting the significance level according to Bonferroni's method. Again, this may be a reasonable course, given the exploratory nature of the study, but this decision needs to be addressed and justified in the text.

The major problem with article currently, however, is its written English. There are widespread grammatical errors and stylistic oddities that greatly detract from the transmission of its message. It is critical that it receive extensive compulsory revision by a first-language English speaker before it can be further assessed.

Level of interest: An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

Quality of written English: Not suitable for publication unless extensively edited

Statistical review: Yes, but I do not feel adequately qualified to assess the statistics.
Declaration of competing interests:

I declare that I have no competing interests