Reviewer's report

Title: Comparison of communication skills between medical students admitted after interviews or on academic merits/SAT - less underperforming among those admitted after interviews

Version: 2 Date: 22 February 2012

Reviewer: Wolfgang Hampe

Reviewer's report:

Major compulsory revisions

The main finding is that with interview admission it is possible to reduce the number of students with inferior communication skills which are assessed with the evaluation of only one interview. The finding would be strengthened if it doesn’t depend on the chosen cut point for underperformance. In the “data and analyses” section the authors argue that their threshold of 10 points is “in accordance with the generally used passing level of 2/3 of the total score, as it implies a rating of performance as non-satisfactory in more than two of the six dimensions”. I can not follow this reasoning: Even a student with 12 points could have been graded in 3 dimensions with inferior (and in the other 3 dimensions with superior). Following the argumentation of the authors, underperformers should be defined by inferior performance in at least 2 dimensions. Another rationale would be to define underperformers by achieving less than 2/3 of the maximum points, i.e. 12 out of 18. I conclude that the setting of the cut point is rather arbitrary.

Since the significance of the finding is just below the significance threshold of 0.05 and the relatively low number of underperformers in the different groups makes the statistical analysis difficult, I strongly recommend to include the analysis of other threshold values into the results and the discussion. In the comment on my first review the authors already give these data. With cut points of 9 or 11 the main finding was less significant or not significant any more. This should be discussed.

There seems to be an error in table 3: How can the adjusted OR for Age (0.34) lie outside the 95% confidence interval (0.81-1.07)? The same problem appears with the interview admission for a cut point of 9 in the comment on my first review.

You state that no additional sources of assessments of students’ communication skills were available. Other researchers have used OSCE scores for the validation of assessment interviews. Even if the other OSCE stations were not of sufficient length or did not include communication skills, it would be interesting to compare them to the more sophisticated evaluation of only one station which you have given so far.

Please include the original OSCE score of
• the evaluated interview station
• all combined interview stations of the OSCE
• all combined stations of the OSCE
for the interview and the traditional group in the results section.

You now mention that 72% of the students had been admitted 8 semesters ahead. Could you please also mention how many of the 96 (classical) and 168 (interview) students who were admitted in fall 2004 or spring 2005 took part in the OSCE? Can you reproduce the finding from [13] that the dropout rate is lower in the interview group?

Minor Essential Revisions
The title should be shortened and more cautious due to the low significance of the results. In my eyes the running title could be used instead.

Discretionary Revisions
P2 line 2: “results on ‘a’ written”
P6 line 3: please let the sentence “Medical school in Sweden is of 5.5 year” be checked by a native speaker
P9 line 3 from below: “GPA scores were” instead of was
P11 second paragraph first line: correct the space between “that” and “academic”
P11 line 3 from below: admissions instead of admission

**Level of interest:** An article of limited interest

**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