Reviewer's report

Title: A Feasibility Study of the Effect of a Visual Arts-based Program on the Scores of Jefferson Scale for Physician Empathy

Version: 2 Date: 5 September 2013

Reviewer: Iman Hegazi

Reviewer's report:

Empathy is an indispensable quality especially in a profession as important as medicine where empathy plays an essential role in ‘professionalism’. More studies in this field should be encouraged particularly if it is related to the improvement of physician empathy. I have read the manuscript with great interest. The title was a main factor that triggered my interest into reading the paper plus my own interest in the subject matter. However, there are some issues that require addressing before I can recommend it for publication.

The question posed by the authors is well-defined. The method is appropriate but did not mention any age or gender balance. The demographics were unclear. There is too much emphasis on the “Visual arts-based program”. This would be better summarised with reference to the authors’ qualitative paper.

Major Compulsory Revisions

There are 2 major essential issues that need to be included in the revisions.

1. The data are missing the demographics, specifically gender and age. This could have added so much to the findings. Previous research shows that there is a gender difference in empathy. It would have been interesting to know if the program had a significant effect on either gender or on particular age groups.

2. In the authors’ previous research, how did the attendees reveal their interest in the course? And, what was their attitude during the course? Was there any cynicism towards the course from the attendees?

The reason why I ask this is because people may respond positively when you ask them if they find the course useful but, may not engage in the course for other reasons. This, of course, may consequently influence the results.

The results were insufficient and therefore, the discussion was compromised. I believe if the author adds the demographics to the results we may have a more inclusive research.

I have some concerns around the discussion but I feel that once the revised the manuscript is revised everything will fall into place. A point which requires further explanation is why the author thinks there wasn’t a significant increase in the JPSE score following the intervention. The sample size (n=110) was mentioned to be small, although one may argue that it is a good sized sample. The only other explanation provided is the time of exposure (4 hours) with no indications as to why this was chosen in the first place and why the author thinks it may have
not been sufficient.
The authors clearly acknowledge the work upon which they are building, both published and unpublished but limitations of the work were not clearly stated. The title and abstract accurately convey what has been found but should be modified once the changes have been made. The writing is acceptable.

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

**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’