Reviewer's report

Title: Does a mandatory clerkship in Geriatric Medicine improve care of subsequent older acute medical patients? A retrospective cohort study

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Reviewer: Jean S Ker

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Reviewers Report
Does a mandatory clerkship in geriatric medicine improve care of subsequent older acute medical patients? A retrospective cohort study
Onge et al

Overview
This is an important area to review in terms of both learning for students and the care of older people. There is a growing need for students in whatever health care discipline to be aware of the care of older people given the changes in demographics.

The improvement in clinical outcomes of those patients looked after by those who had been through the mandatory programme appears impressive and although the Charlson co-morbidity Index was calculated to draw some comparison between cases there was no clear understanding of the breadth of conditions seen.

The limitations of the study and the different confounding factors influencing the results are described to some extent but alternative explanations are not explored. The authors correctly identify the need to evaluate the patient outcomes from an educational intervention and this study highlights some of the inherent difficulties of doing this especially 8 years later.

This paper focuses on clerkships carried out in 2005? Why isn’t this being compared to what is happening now?

Who are the clerks? – Are they medical or nursing and what level of qualification do they have and therefore how can they influence care outcomes?

The study design is questionable as there is no indication of what support those who didn’t undertake the mandatory clerkship were given in relation to cognitive assessment, recognition of medications causing confusion and early removal of indwelling catheters have been given.

What has the lasting impact of this educational intervention been?

What is the process for admission of geriatric patients now Has this changed?

Is the clerkship mandatory for all students now?