Reviewer's report

Title: Why should I prepare? A mixed Method Study exploring the Motives of medical undergraduate Students to prepare for educational Activities

Version: 1 Date: 23 December 2011

Reviewer: Joy Rudland

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Major Compulsory Revisions
I enjoyed reading this article and considering the strong utilization of group work where preparatory work is required, I feel it is very pertinent to most medical educators. I have one major compulsory revision to suggest and all other comments are restricted to minor essential or discretionary.

Discussion - I was very disappointed in the discussion. I feel the discussion needs expansion to maximize the findings. The researchers had done the hard work in collecting the data and then fail to deliver on good interpretation. Indicative is that in a 32 page document 4 pages were devoted to the discussion.

Some specific example:
• Differing views on preparation between academic years, which was indicated in the results - page 17 – was not discussed. Why do the authors do thinks there was this difference?
• the discrepancy between the qualitative and quantitative data, re:: “ambiguous attitude towards self/teacher directed learning”, is not discussed – page 18. Interestingly this section reports the qualitative data in a quantitative way which is not seen in the results section. New results should not be introduced in the discussion.

The implications for education need to be bolstered. There appear to be several things that curriculum planers could do to enhance preparation. Particularly the opportunity to in build the preparatory work and the need to be more student centered. Whilst students may value the 'explanation’ by the expert staff member this may be ably achieved by a student under the facilitation of the staff. What things as educators can we attend do.

There are some important key findings here that need teased out.

A point to note: the 15 minute period of the focus group does seem prohibitively short. This has been explained in the limitations of the study page 19, but I am concerned that saturation was reached within the context of a shorter period. I do wonder if longer was given more themes might have emerged. I way to test this would have to have run one group and seen if the number of issues raised was comparable. However considering the unpredictable nature of focus groups this may prove little. So although a real concern I am unsure what can be done about
this and I would not like this aspect to jeopardize publication.

Minor Essential Revisions
In places the English appears a little turgid and a re-examination to reduce superfluous English would be desirable. For example Abstract background “Many students prepared because they wanted to know what to expect and what would be asked to do during the session.” To “Many students prepared because they wanted to know what to expect before and during the session”.

Background
Page 4 – First sentences needs a reference or tone down i.e. “Some educational institutes rely on students . . . (strongly is very quantitative)

Page 7 – Procedures - suggested word change, currently a bit verbose. There are a number of these instances but it may be a style thing. Suggestion:

Ethical approval was obtained from the educational management board of the Faculty. Student’s participation was completely voluntary, anonymous, and lack of participation incurred no consequence. All approached students consented to participate.

Results
Page 9 - “We present the results according to the themes (table 1) with illustrative quotations from the interviews depicted in italic.” This sentence gives the impression table includes quotes which are actually described in the text not the table. I am not even sure table 1 is needed; it is just a heading list.

Page 15, not sure we need all the prose and table 2, one of the other will do.
I am unfamiliar with the principal component analysis with direct oblimim rotation so further input may be required.

Page 16, insert somewhere “– table 3 can be inserted here –“

Page 11, spelling of venepuncture

Discretionary Revisions
An interesting feature was the separation of the methods and results of the two studies (I and II) rather than a combined methods and results. I would have preferred to see them combined.

I don’t feel the last two sentences on page 5 are required. Starting “ We demonstrated . . .

The term ‘homework’ has connotations with secondary schooling. I wonder if independent work is more appropriate.

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field
Quality of written English: Needs some language corrections before being published

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