Reviewer's report

Title: Quality Assurance in Transnational Higher Education: a case study of the tropEd network

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Reviewer: Arie Rotem

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Review of
Re: 'Quality Assurance in Transnational Higher Education: a case study of the tropEd network'
Prisca AC Zwanikken, Bernadette B Peterhans, Lorraine L Dardis and Albert A Scherpbier

The authors address an emerging trend for international cooperation in the delivery of higher education. Learning opportunities across institutional boundaries enable more flexibility, relevance and depth, building on a larger pool of resources and expertise. As the authors indicate, the success of this approach depends on close cooperation and dialogue among the member institutions and the use of rigorous methods to ensure quality and transparency.

The topic is well presented, defined and justified. Review of country experiences provides a good frame for understanding the state of the art and the issues arising from this endeavor. The focus on a particular program, the tropEd is useful as a case study of how it is done in practice and the considerations governing the design of the approach.

Overall the issues raised are important and well defined. The methods for obtaining the information and including a systematic literature review and participant-observations are suitable and congruent with the interpretation and findings presentation.

In my opinion the paper deserves publication as it improves our knowledge about education without walls across institutional and national boundaries with good management of the risks associated with assessment of academic attainment and quality of education.

I would like to suggest minor discretionary improvements.

1. The authors list some of the benefits identified by member institutions but do not mention perceived challenges and disadvantages.

2. Given the rigorous method of approving modules and determining equivalence, is there a danger of stifling educational innovations and educational content and exposure that are outside the current conventions of what constitutes a suitable program of study?
3. The authors mention key criteria for approval of modules including learning objectives linked to assessment but I was wondering whether attention is given to learning activities (instructional methods, students’ opportunity to practice and be exposed etc) In my experience the quality and adequacy of learning activities is critical. Maybe more could be said about the criteria for accreditation (for example learning environment, depth of teaching faculty etc)

4. In the absence of existing system, The tropEd developed its own system for quality review, it may be worthwhile to consider however how it could benchmark its mechanism against other well established systems in relation to equivalent sections (such as assessment procedures and teaching methods)

It was a pleasure to read this well written and informative paper and I recommend that it be published in BMC Medical Education.

I declare that I have no conflicting interest in reviewing this paper.

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