Reviewer's report

Title: History-taking and empathetic communication - two sides of the same coin?

Version: 1 Date: 24 January 2013

Reviewer: John Frain

Reviewer's report:

Major compulsory revisions
1. Please review the references and information used in your introduction to reflect more up to date work and give clearer context.
2. It would help to describe how these skills are taught in your own institution by way of background.
3. It would be helpful to provide a copy of the CARE questionnaire and some examples of items covered in the histories.
4. Information of blinding of assessors is required in your methods section.
5. You need to state when the outcome measures were decided and why these ones were chosen.
6. Why not compare empathy with amount of information volunteered by patients?
7. Given the amount of data collected the results seem quite limited in scope.
8. It would be helpful to know whether certain types of medical information were more likely to be collected or volunteered than others and whether any of these correlated with empathy.
9. Some discussion of how empathy could be used to improve information gathering would be of interest.
10. How will this study change practice in your own institution?

This is a study of interest particularly as it is in a European setting. I am sure there is a reasonably good article in here if the above points can be addressed. Please see also the attached document for more detailed comment.

Level of interest: An article of limited interest

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