Reviewer's report

Title: Near-peer physiotherapy students as standardized patients enhances self-reported constructs in both the learner and the near-peer patient

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Reviewer: Brian Mavis

Reviewer's report:

The authors describe a study where senior physiotherapy students were used as standardized patients for formative feedback of junior students. The paper is well-written and clearly organized. The authors have developed clear research questions to guide the study and the reader. The Results are somewhat expected.

Major Compulsory Revisions

The most pressing question generally is what is novel about this study; how does it add to the body of knowledge around the use of standardized patients for the training of health professions students? The authors cite studies that report on the use of senior students to educate more junior students, including studies of students as standardized patients. The Discussion section as written supports the feasibility of this approach but does not adequately address what is novel in this study or what can be learned from this study. This is the major area where the paper needs to be strengthened.

In the limitations described on p. 15, the authors indicate that the data are based on self-reports and does not include any performance measures. Thus the paper focuses on students’ satisfaction with the educational experience rather than the effectiveness of the learning experience. Again, it is not clear, given this limitation, how this paper is advancing the body of scholarship in this area.

p. 11 The analyses reported in the Results section are based on a large number of univariate statistical tests and given the large number a certain proportion would be expected to achieve significance by chance. The authors could address this in a number of ways, such as aggregating items to create scaled scores, modifying the probability considered significant or using more multivariate methods.

Minor essential revisions:

p. 4 the authors state that the physiotherapy students “have a different set of needs” than pharmacy students for the study cited, however these needs are not specified and on reading further it appears that many of the measured outcomes are similar to those described for the pharmacy students.

p. 7 I read the statement that “junior students completed a patient interview and physical examination of the senior student in groups of 5-6 in a two hour session”
to mean that there were not individual encounters between the junior student and standardized patient. If this is true, then perhaps the sentence could be rewritten as “Groups of 5-6 junior students met with a standardized patient (senior student) to complete a patient interview and physical examination.” This would be clearer I think. If the SP encounters were with individual junior students then the sentence should be rewritten for clarity.

p.8 In the analysis section, the statement that “paired t-tests were performed to compare responses between years and courses” is unclear and difficult to visualize given the study design.

p. 20 There appears to be an error in Table 1: for the Year 4 cohort, 34 female students represent 67% of the total group of 51 students.

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

Quality of written English: Acceptable

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