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: Clare Delany

Reviewer’s report:

This paper is well written and presented. The central idea was to evaluate the impact on self perceived elements of learning of senior physiotherapy students acting as standardized patients for junior physiotherapy students.

I understood this central idea once I had read through the paper. The title and abstract are a little complex in my view. After reading the paper, I found that ‘near peers’ are senior physiotherapy students. I also found that ‘self reported constructs’ refer to self efficacy and satisfaction etc with the learning experience.

I wonder whether the authors would consider simplifying the title to plainer language using senior and junior physiotherapists etc. (There does not seem to be a definitional reference to the term near peers and it would appear to be one that the authors have devised—I don’t think it adds anything extra to the paper).

I had to read the last sentence of the background section of the abstract a few times to understand it—could this be either split into 2 sentences or simplified to be clearer?

In the description of the methods in the abstract, the authors refer to surveys which examine self reported confidence, communication etc and for senior students’—confidence and insight (I found myself asking insight into what??). I did find the answer later in the paper, but it would be helpful to clarify this in the abstract.

Background

This was well written and easy to follow. There was one paragraph beginning …In addition to considering the benefits of this approach…. (where there were no references used at all—I think readers would be interested in reading about this concept of senior students learning from the teaching experience. I think the discussion makes reference to this.

Methods

I had some concern with the content of the methods. In particular, the statement ‘students had to provide written informed consent’—and to attend and complete the role playing session for the course in which they were enrolled.

Were students ‘invited’ to participate? Was there in fact, any choice for them to
participate in this learning event? If not –then this needs to be stated. What information were the students given and how was it given to them?

How were senior students recruited? Was it compulsory?

Did the fact that neurology and cardiorespiratory used ‘time out’ alter the experience of learning. This is arguably a slightly different pedagogical method. Were the experienced educator physiotherapists briefed in their role in providing feedback? Were these physios drawn from the authors of the paper?

The survey seemed to be based on one other study, rather than the more general term used—literature. I wonder whether the authors could expand on how they altered that pharmacy survey?

Results

The results are well set out. Can the authors explain why data was collected from 92 % of students. If it was part of the course, did some students not participate or not attend –this information about the cohort, their voluntary or otherwise participation is important to situate this study as an evaluation of a teaching method used as part of the standard teaching in one year of a physiotherapy course—as distinct –from a research activity where students are invited to participate or not as they see fit.

Given that the authors were unable to compare these results with other types of teaching methods, I think they might need to make a stronger case which states the importance of students’ perceived self efficacy, confidence and satisfaction following participation in a teaching event as a measure of effective teaching.

The really strong points about this paper are that junior and senior students enjoyed the learning experience and both sets of students reported gains in confidence etc. This finding alone is important because enjoyment, enthusiasm and collegial collaboration are acknowledged aspects of effective learning. Some discussion with reference to educational literature would further strengthen this main finding. The authors also need to more carefully explain the ‘research’ nature of this activity and how students were recruited or whether it more accurately represents a teaching activity where all students participated – the activity being devised by the authors and then evaluated for its impact. If it is the latter, it is still valuable research but this does need to be clarified.

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'