Reviewer's report

Title: Determinants of physician empathy and possible interventions for its promotion: Hypothetical conclusions from an exploratory, qualitative survey with practicing physicians

Version: 4 Date: 6 June 2013

Reviewer: Kathryn Pollak

Reviewer's report:

The authors address an important area, what contributes to physician empathy. This manuscript has several strengths. The authors achieved a respectable response rate from physicians (67%). They also have a decent sample size (n=42). The authors make an interesting observation that because empathy was not taught explicitly, that it gave the message to physicians that it is an innate talent rather than a skill to be taught. The authors present solid “take away” messages from this important work.

The manuscript also could be improved in the following ways.

Major Compulsory Revisions

1. The authors could describe their recruitment methods with more detail. How did they identify the physicians? Why did they choose to send it to 63 physicians?

2. Unclear why one author did the coding and two others “rechecked” the coding. Does that mean that they looked at the original codes to see if they made sense? Is preferable for two coders to work independently.

3. The authors have interesting results. The way they currently present them, however, could be improved. The Results could be presented in a tighter more cogent fashion. As it currently reads, some of the topics and quotes do not seem as related and supporting the theme as they could.

Minor Essential Revisions

4. The authors did not seem to define “empathy” for physicians. Many people mistake the word “empathy” for “sympathy.” It would be have preferable for the authors to state exactly what they meant by empathy.

5. Relying on surveys rather than interviews limited the data the authors obtained (e.g., less than half of responses involved the impact of education on empathy).

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field
**Quality of written English:** Not suitable for publication unless extensively edited

**Statistical review:** Yes, and I have assessed the statistics in my report.

**Declaration of competing interests:**

I declare that I have no competing interests