Reviewer's report

Title: Using focus groups to understand causes for morale decline in an IM residency program: A qualitative investigation

Version: 2 Date: 11 March 2014

Reviewer: Rhona Knight

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Minor essential revision:
1. The question is well posed.
Methods are generally well described. I did wonder what some of the terms meant, as I do not work in same context.

Major compulsory revision
2. I did wonder why external facilitators were not used - reasons for this not made clear. How 'impartial' were they, or did they also have low morale and hence possible axes to grind?
3. The data presented seems sound, but the positive comments (dissenting opinions Theme 4 last paragraph) made by some participants are not described and given little space, leading me to question balance. The question about why these participants were protected from morale decline seems key. Why might the causes you identify not impact on all participants? It also made me wonder if individual interviews might have given more information - as the negativity of some members of the FG may well have impacted on those more positive members, inhibiting contributions. This would have been relevant as your goal was to 'evaluate the utility of using FG methodology to uncover in detail the reasons....'
4. Theme 3 ' Much of the responsibility for morale decline was unfairly.....' Who says it was unfair? How was this judged?
5. Theme 4 'moral outrage and bitterness' how is this defined?

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

Declaration of competing interests:

I am the Royal College of General Practitioners Clinical Lead in the Health for Health Care Professionals Programme.