Reviewer's report

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

Version: 2 Date: 17 March 2014

Reviewer: Iman Hegazi

Reviewer's report:

The authors have simply, yet elegantly, touched upon a very important topic that, with today's fast pace, we probably come across in every organisation. In this day and age, many organisations try and impose change, mostly in good faith, thinking that the process was well thought-through. Most organisations come up with a plan or change then simply inform or persuade employees to implement it, assuming that the personal aims and wishes of the employees are aligned with those of the organisation; where, instead and according to the 'psychological contract theory', organisations should first explore ways to align their aims with the aims and needs of their people.

The question posed by the authors is reasonable and well-defined and the methods are appropriate and well-described. The manuscript adheres to the relevant standards and the discussion and conclusions are well-balanced and adequately supported by the data.

The authors have clearly stated the limitations of their work. They have also acknowledged that their research question is based on data from a previous survey and that they are trying to interpret the survey findings through the FGDs. I think that clarifying the results of this quantitative survey would give further strength to this study. I will leave this to the authors as I am unsure of the extent to which they have studied the quantitative survey. But, if the surveys have been researched, I would recommend that they be acknowledged.

The abstract accurately conveys the findings of the study but the title may be somewhat misleading. The title seems to suggest that the actual IM residency program was the cause of morale decline whereas the results show that it is mainly due to changes made to the program. I suggest using a title that would accurately convey the findings of the research. Here are a couple of examples but I will leave it in the hands of the authors:

Using focus group discussions to understand causes for morale decline after introducing change in an Internal Medicine residency program

Understanding causes for morale decline after introducing change in an Internal Medicine residency program: A qualitative investigation

The manuscript is well-written and I have thoroughly enjoyed reading it. I recommend that this research be published after making some minor revisions.
Minor Essential revisions:
1. Change of title so that it accurately conveys the findings of the research
2. Refer to quantitative survey that the research builds upon
3. Include the set of open-ended questions used in the FGDs in an appendix and refer to them in the text

Level of interest: An exceptional article

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.