Reviewer's report

Title: On Death and Dying - Evaluation of a Reflective, Interdisciplinary Course Element in Anatomy Undergraduate Teaching

Version: 1 Date: 2 October 2013

Reviewer: Jan Gaertner

Reviewer's report:

The authors present the evaluation of a Reflective, Interdisciplinary Course Element in Anatomy Undergraduate Teaching. The subject is absolutely relevant for medical education. To say this in the authors’ words: “The anatomy course contributes to the ritual transformation of students from laypersons to medical practitioners.”

The title is precise and accurately conveys the scope of the article. The background information is adequately presented and the deduction of the research question is comprehensible. Though I did not explicitly cross check with every item of reporting guidelines for qualitative studies such as COREQ, the manuscript reporting seems to be almost impeccable. Still, some minor suggestions for further improvement of the article are provided below. Methods and results sections do not leave many open questions and unnecessary information is avoided. Minor comments and questions are stated below. The discussion and conclusions is well balanced and adequately supported by the data, limitations are discussed openly. Again, some minor comments that may be helpful to improve the legibility of the manuscript are provided below. Not being a native speaker I hesitate to provide suggestions concerning grammar, orthography and style, but some critical comments can be found below.

Major Compulsory Revisions
None

Minor Essential Revisions
Please be aware that I did not check whether formatting of the references is consistent and fits the formatting criteria of BMC.

Discretionary Revisions
a) Figurative or odd-sounding wording
Knowing that since I am not a native speaker, and therefore I might be mistaken, some terms sound figurative or odd. I suggest the authors may critically reappraise the use of the following terms:
Preliminaries
Backdrop
forefront
compulsory subject
dignified
exchange with social contacts

b) Structure

The introduction includes a description of the course. Might this not better fit in the methods section? To me it seems that the introduction does not consequently lead to HYPOTHESES and main AIM of the study.

c) Other working groups

Not being too familiar with the subject I still believe the French working group of Plaisant et al has contributed a number of original articles to similar or related topics (e.g. Plaisant O, Medical students’ attitudes towards science and gross anatomy, and the relationship to personality. J Anat. 2013). I suggest to reassess their contribution to this subject and discuss relevant findings in the article.

d) German literature

I would advise to rely on indexed articles. Especially the frequently cited work of Elsner et al seem to be cited far too often and more relevant citations are readily available.

e) Attitude

Already in the introduction and also in the discussion I perceive that it would be helpful to add a sentence that teaching “attitude” is central Palliative Care expertise to explain why the PallCare Dep engaged in developing and implementing the course.

f) Other comments

-Omit “()“ here (twice in the article) ?:
Reflecting about (one’s own or the patient’s) death and dying is considered a key element for empathic patient care
-Wouldn’t “prerequisites” be better than “key elements” here?
Reflecting about (one’s own or the patient’s) death and dying is considered a key element for empathic patient care

- Be consistent with the number of digits after the decimal places (e.g. 62.7% or 62%) and 62.7%

-Is the gender distribution of respondents representative for the anatomy course?

-Throughout the manuscript, standard deviations and significance measures are missing. Is this due to avoid multiple testing problems?

-Please correct: “This might related to the fact…”
Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: Yes, but I do not feel adequately qualified to assess the statistics.

Declaration of competing interests:
No conflict of interest