Reviewer's report

Title: A survey of factors influencing career preference in new-entrant and exiting medical students from four UK medical schools

Version: 1 Date: 14 January 2014

Reviewer: Janet Yates

Reviewer's report:

1 Is the question posed by the authors well defined?  
YES
2 Are the methods appropriate and well described?

YES
3 Are the data sound?
YES
4 Does the manuscript adhere to the relevant standards for reporting and data deposition?
YES
5 Are the discussion and conclusions well balanced and supported by the data
YES
6 Are limitations of the work clearly stated
YES
7 Do the authors clearly acknowledge any work upon which they are building, both published and unpublished
YES
8 Do the title and abstract accurately convey what has been found?
YES
9 Is the writing acceptable?
YES

It was a pleasure to read this paper, which is topical, relevant to a wide audience, describes a well-designed study, and is written up in a clear and straightforward manner. I have only a few minor suggestions plus typos to deal with.

Major revisions – none

Minor essential revisions:
1 Background, 2nd para, comma rather than semi-colon after ‘curricula’

2 Background, 5th para, typo with double ]] after MMIs

3 Data analysis, please state what type of regression analysis was used (other authors may wish to replicate your study methods)

4 Results, Response rate. I was a bit puzzled as to how the overall response rate could be 80.9% if the two datasets yielded 80.4 & 81; in fact I think the 2nd figure (Year 5) should be 81.4%. (and maybe this overall figure would be more logical as the last sentence in the section, rather than the first?)

5 Same para and in various Tables, where Chi square tests are quoted - do these stats relate to the differences between the highest and lowest proportions for the given data category? Please make this clearer.

6 Results, Demographics, end of section, typo with double ]]

Discretionary revisions:

1 Background, 3rd para. I think it might be clearer that you are referring to the US studies if you put ‘findings from these graduate-entry students …’

2 Methods, 3rd para, perhaps better to put a full stop after ‘…all FPs.’ Then new sentence, ‘However, there is …’

3 Data Analysis, definition of ‘older students’ as those aged 22 & above. I can’t argue with this if that is the definition use by the BMA, but it might be worth pointing out that many papers in the UK use 21 and over as the cut-off point.

4 Results, descriptive text relating to career preferences and stats from regression analysis. Unless I have misinterpreted your data, Tables 3 & 4 all contain the significant independent predictors of career choice, derived from a regression against each specialty choice, rather than associations as described in the Table headings. Would it not be better to put the short para stating ‘The analysis was adjusted for demographic …’ at the start of the descriptive text, rather than half-way through, as it is as the moment? And then perhaps put a short sub-title to each para? I am not sure why you did not tabulate the data from the 2nd para, which I think relates to 1st choices, although this is not explicitly stated.

5 Same section, I’m not sure why you bring in Table 5 data part-way through, then return to points relating to the regressions in Tables 3 & 4 (and without referring back to these Tables). This is a little confusing to the reader.

6 Discussion, Comparison with existing literature, 2nd para, maybe your point relating to the views about surgery would be stronger if you put ‘… still being defined in traditional male terms.’

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 declare that I have no competing interests'