Reviewer's report

Title: Defining Professionalism: Differences by Gender and Institution

Version: 2 Date: 27 October 2013

Reviewer: Orit Karniel-Miller

Reviewer's report:

The present study examines residents’ perceptions and behaviors related to unprofessional behavior comparing between gender and institutions toward defining professionalism. Within the study two institutions are compared. The move toward defining professionalism and figuring out how residents perceive and experience it is worthwhile. This paper moves this exploration one step forward.

The study is clearly written. The abstract, literature review and methods are written well and informative. I do have some comments and questions concerning the qualitative analysis, the results and especially the discussion. My questions/concerns are written below:

Major Compulsory Revisions
1. Please explain why the qualitative analysis was not split by institution and gender.
2. Please elaborate on the qualitative results. Explain the type of behaviors they referred to related to respect, etc.
3. In the discussion you state that your study "findings inform our understanding of the professionalism issues that may be most pertinent to this generation of learners." I am unclear how this is the case. You decided on the issues and behaviors and we do not know they are actually the most pertinent ones… I would revise this statement.
4. Although you state that this study explores institutional differences this is actually very limited, as the residents answered about their previous institutions and experiences. I believe that in your next wave you will have more information about these institutions but at this point I suggest stating this issue as a limitation.

Minor Essential Revisions
5. I suggest connecting between the qualitative and the quantitative results. Using the qualitative results to explain/elaborate the quantitative results.

1. In the end of p. 8 you discuss the need to help learners identify their institutional norms. From your findings, of the differences between institutions, they are capable of doing that. The question remains on how they can act against problematic norms that they see…
2. In the discussion you refer to the "on the spot correction" when residents act in an unprofessional manner. However, this ignores the finding that they are
exposed and observe unprofessional behavior much more than they act in this way. Therefore, those who are supposed to correct and feedback them are negative role models... please discuss this.

3. When discussing gender you refer to references about differences between genders communication style and attitudes. Please elaborate how these studies actually relate to your findings.

4. Within the same paragraph you raise a hypotheses about a possible, interesting, explanation for males actions. I would suggest elaborating and providing additional theoretical and empirical literature about the rationalization process they may go through to explain it.

5. In the same paragraph you refer to two items in table 4 that reached statistical significance. Please state which items these are clearly.

6. Concerning the issue of respect, it would be interesting to compare your qualitative findings with those of our recent findings published in Journal of General Internal Medicine: Exploring the meaning of respect in medical student education: an analysis of student narratives.

7. On p. 11 second paragraph you provide some possible explanations for the decision to report patient information as normal when uncertainty exists. Perhaps another explanation that is worth exploring is related to an environment that doesn't encourage talking about uncertainty and has difficulty tolerating being wrong. This focuses on the problems within the environment, and not merely on the individual student/resident.

8. The second part of the second full paragraph on p. 11 is unclear. Please revise.

9. I think additional limitations should be explicitly written down:
   a. The fact that the 46 behaviors were only unprofessional behaviors may have led participants to "know" that they are expected to state that these are unprofessional behaviors.
   b. I think you should mention the fact that this cannot reflect institutional differences, as these residents just "arrived" to these institutions and their experiences happened elsewhere.
   c. You mention that their perceptions may change – I would add that their actions may change as well.

10. Delete one "whether" in the second paragraph in the conclusions.

I declare that I have no competing interests.

Good luck and I look forward to reading the next papers from this data.

Level of interest: An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

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