Reviewer's report

Title: Influence of the Hospital Workplace on Learning Clinical Skills

Version: 2 Date: 3 November 2013

Reviewer: Tim Dornan

Reviewer's report:

This research was thoroughly conducted and is ethically sound. It addresses an important topic. Although rather lengthy, the narrative account of workplace skills education adds something valuable to the literature. The research is well grounded in theory; using the work of Eraut as an interpretive framework is a strength. There is a very good list of references. I see no need for a fundamental revision, but suggest two enhancements:

1. Like much of the literature to date, this paper regards the intervention – an internal medicine clerkship – as a black box. It is rather like publishing a qualitative study of the relationship between breakfast and indigestion without considering whether the subjects habitually eat sushi, pancakes with maple syrup, or bacon and eggs. Dutch clerkships are certainly different from British ones and, I surmise, Japanese ones. The paper could be considerably enhanced by a description of the clerkships in question.

2. The authors are rather vague about who they are addressing – consider, for example, the conclusion in the abstract. Who should be more proactive? I suggest that the answer to the question is in Stephen Billett's seminal work on mutual interdependence. Despite all he has published before and since then, he regards his 2006 paper as the main exposition of his theory. What he argues in it is that learners' proactive behaviour is at least partly determined by the "invitational qualities" of workplaces, which are in the gift of clinical teachers. I suggest the authors read that paper and re-read their own narrative under the heading "contextual factors" and give the abstract and discussion more focus on the paper's intended readership. The impact of this research, I suggest, could be increased as a result.

With those rather minor provisos, I recommend this paper for publication.

Tim Dornan

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 have no competing interests to declare