Reviewer's report

Title: Impact of postgraduate training on communication skills teaching: a controlled study

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Reviewer: Marcy E Rosenbaum

Reviewer's report:

Overall, this is an interesting and well designed study and report which uses a more rigorous evaluation design than many previous studies of this topic. The authors address an important issue, provide appropriate background, and also comprehensive address limitations of their study design.

Major Compulsory Revisions - None

Minor Essential revisions - there are a few typos in the abstract and the text. Authors should go through manuscript one more time to catch where there are a few places where an extra word should be deleted.

Discretionary revisions - To make the paper have more practical significance, a little more detail about the training would be helpful in terms of what (if any) particular communication skills and feedback techniques were emphasized in both the group workshop and the coaching sessions. Though they refer generally to this in terms of calgary cambridge guide and the need for feedback to be interactive, this could benefit from more detail. More detail about the training content would also allow for more to be said about results, in particular the skills that were addressed more interactively with residents. Table 5 identifies skills in which the experimental group had substantial increases in addressing interactively - for example, several where pre-intervention interactive discussions were less than 10% but post intervention more than 80%. This made me wondered if these poor communication skills were emphasized more in the training than some of the other skills. Also, since one of the principles of effective feedback is to limit the number of skills addressed - increasing the number of skills discussed does not seem to be as important as discussing them interactively. It would be helpful to have this information clarified a bit more.

Finally, in the discussion to make this of practical significance it would be helpful if the authors would comment more on 1) if the results have pushed them to change their training in terms of what skills they need to emphasize that their participants are not picking up on (they do identify adding checklist approaches may help - though could be overwhelming) and more importantly what exactly about the training they feel resulted in improved feedback skills. My sense is that it was likely the one to one coaching sessions that focused on this but I am not sure - would like the authors to comment on it so it can help guide others developing communication teaching training sessions.
Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Needs some language corrections before being published

Statistical review: No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

Declaration of competing interests:

I declare I have no competing interests