Reviewer’s report

Title: How Well Do Second-Year Students Learn Physical Diagnosis? Observational Study of an Objective Structured Clinical Examination (OSCE)

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Reviewer: Dr Brian Mavis

Level of interest: A paper of limited interest

Advice on publication: Unable to decide on acceptance or rejection until I see revised version

Two major concerns regarding the paper as presented.

1. As written, the research questions/purpose of the study are not clear and do not provide any indication of how this study contributes to furthering knowledge in medical education, particularly with regards to the use of the OSCE. As written, it is a report about a formative OSCE implemented within one medical school and does not appear very generalizable to other settings.

2. The lack of rater reliability information is a serious shortcoming, in that it is well-documented that checklists are subject to significant rater biases, which unchecked contributes a significant amount of error to OSCE scores, limiting their value. There is no discussion of the extent to which faculty and or SP raters were trained for the OSCE, nor is there information about how familiar the raters were with the forms being used.

3. A third concern is related to the lack of rater-reliability information. I wonder if the stability of the OSCE over time is as much an artifact of rater bias obscuring real differences in performance. A discussion about the usefulness of the data derived from the OSCE would be helpful. Though formative, could the data be used to meaningfully discriminate students performing at different levels? Does the information derived from the OSCE provide useful information to faculty about teaching, and is it used to modify instruction with an effort of improving educational outcomes?

Competing interests:

None declared.