Reviewer's report

Title: Medical Student's and Resident's Preferred Site Characteristics and Preceptor Behaviours for Learning in the Ambulatory Setting: A Cross-sectional Survey

Version: 2 Date: 24 May 2004

Reviewer: Walter Kernan

Reviewer's report:

General:
1) The revised manuscript is more complete, succinct and clear.
2) The presentation of data on values placed on site characteristics and teaching behaviors according to site, gender, and level is still overwhelming. One has to look at these graphs very hard to see what significant information emerges from them. Eight graphs reveal only a small amount of useful data. If the authors chose to leave in the graphs, the text could be modified to describe the main messages more crisply. Among those modifications, I would consider adding a box or simple table listing the 3 or 4 main findings from these graphs. One could argue that a simple box such as this could replace graphs 1-8.
3) There are misspellings in the title. “student’s” should be students’. “Resident’s” should be residents’.

Abstract:
1) Readers may be confused by the terms used to describe the research population. “Students” is used sometimes to refer to learners who are still in medical school or to medical students and residents. This is particularly a problem in the abstract where the Background section refers to “students” and the methods section refers to “medical students and residents”. I was initially confused about who actually comprised the research population. Consider using “learner” to refer to students and residents, but define this term up front.
2) The abstract is much improved. The reference to “significant differences” in the results section without further information may cause frustration in some readers. Could you describe the key findings or even one example?
3) The word “unhelpful” in the conclusion section may not be accurate. “Unvalued” would seem more appropriate.

Background:
1) No comments

Methods:
1) In the last sentence on page 5 (beginning “To ensure privacy . . .”), it is not clear who “they” refer to.
2) Excellent description of factor analysis.

Results:
1) Figure 5 should be fixed before publication. The legend refers to “patient” instead of “patient logistics” as defined in text. The authors have described other problems with this figure in their reply to the review.
2) Consider using separate paragraphs for the presentation of data on associations between sites,
gender, and level with preferences.

3) I do not understand the two sentences on page 8: “Significant differences in positive responses were most often seen with the clerks (8 items) . . . ” I could not identify these 8 items in the graphs and I am not sure what is meant by a positive response.

**What next?:** Accept after minor essential revisions