Reviewer's report

Title: Mapping medical careers: Questionnaire assessment of career preferences in medical school applicants and final year students

Version: 1 Date: 30 June 2004

Reviewer: Michael M Goldacre

Reviewer's report:

General -

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Major Compulsory Revisions (that the author must respond to before a decision on publication can be reached)

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Minor Essential Revisions (such as missing labels on figures, or the wrong use of a term, which the author can be trusted to correct)

1. Page 12, 'The medical student samples', 2nd paragraph, 1st sentence: needs attention. It may simply be that the word 'and' is missing between 'applicant data...' and '...the combined...'
2. Page 13, 'The medical student sample', 3rd paragraph, last sentence: typo in 'attitudes' and perhaps say 'younger' rather than 'non-mature'.
3. Last sentence before Discussion: typo in '1991'.
4. Figure 9: the meaning of the values on the vertical and horizontal axes are not clear.

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Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)

5. The sample sizes for the six surveys (three cohorts at application and at final year) varied a lot. Are the authors confident that the smallish samples (eg 301 and 312 subjects) are sufficient for the multivariate analyses undertaken? And the drop in the 1986 cohort from 1118 subjects at application in the final year looks substantial - is there an explanation for this?
6. It is not clear how the answers to questions about career choices are converted into the scores that become the plots on the Figures. Could this be clarified?
7. It is not clear what the 'stress levels' mean, in the section on 'The medical student sample', second paragraph, and how they should be interpreted. Could this be clarified?
8. The authors specify 'six prototypical specialities' (Discussion, fourth paragraph). These do not include general practice. Is this because it is not regarded as 'a speciality'? How does general practice fit in to the reasoning?
9. Opening sentence of introduction: it's not so much that medical careers 'end' in this context, but that 'postgraduate training ends with most doctors specialised...'.

What next?: Accept after minor essential revisions

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: No

Declaration of competing interests:
None