Reviewer's report

Title: Student evaluation of an OSCE in Paediatrics at the University of the West Indies, Jamaica

Version: 1  Date: 10 May 2004

Reviewer: John Spencer

Reviewer's report:

Thank you for asking me to review this paper which I enjoyed reading. Whilst the findings themselves (namely, that students found the OSCE process acceptable, but that it was also anxiety-provoking and ambiguous) are unsurprising, the literature on students' views about assessment is relatively sparse. This paper could make a useful addition to that literature. The paper is well written, the methods are appropriate to the purpose of the study, the results are for the most part clearly presented, and the discussion and conclusions are well balanced.

Major compulsory revisions
(1) Methods – More detail is required about how 'face and content validity of each checklist was established by review and consensus'.
(2) Methods – What exactly do the authors mean by the term 'Sensitisation about the Departmental and Faculty need for evaluation of the exam'?
(3) Methods – Students cannot 'determine the usefulness of the OSCE as an assessment instrument'; they can, however, give their opinion about the usefulness of the instrument.
(4) Methods – Did the OSCE review session take place after the evaluation? This would obviously influence students' views if it were at the same time.
(5) Methods – Who carried 'a form of content analysis by identifying themes'; was it one of the authors? did any of the other authors (or indeed anyone else) analyse the data? if not, why not? if not, how might this affect interpretation of results (this is obviously for the discussion section)
(6) Results – I appreciate that the authors have used an already available questionnaire to evaluate the OSCE. However, there is a little confusion in the way the results are presented in the Tables. Firstly no reference is made in the text to the 'Attribute' column which is in all three Tables. In Table 1 I'm not sure how the question about to exam stress is related to the attribute 'Content validity related to construct'. Similarly, how is 'Exam intimidating' related to 'Authenticity'? Again, in Table 3, how does 'Construct irrelevant variance' relate to the question about personality, ethnicity etc? All in all I don't really think the 'Attributes' column adds anything to the paper – that is, unless the authors incorporated a relevant discussion about them in Discussion section. Otherwise, I would suggest dropping the 'Attribute' column in all Tables as it does not add to the paper, and may in fact obfuscate a general reader who has no specialist expertise in assessment.

Minor compulsory revisions
(1) Discussion – The limitations of the study could be discussed in more detail – for example how responses may have been influenced by the timing of the inquiry – immediately after an exam students are stressed. After a period of reflection this inevitably dissipates a little, and once results are published (and most students realise they have passed!!), and feedback has been given, student perspectives usually change. This is an issue that bedevils attempts at evaluating educational events.

Discretionary revisions
The authors may have missed a key reference; I know this because I am one of the co-authors! It looks at students' views about purpose and fairness of assessment, and there were similar findings. It is: Duffield KE, Spencer JA. A survey of medical students' views about the purposes and fairness
of assessment. Medical Education 2002;36:879-86. Obviously it is up to the authors whether they feel it is appropriate to cite the paper.

**What next?:** Unable to decide on acceptance or rejection until the authors have responded to the major compulsory revisions

**Level of interest:** An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

**Quality of written English:** Acceptable

**Declaration of competing interests:**

None.
However, I am External Examiner to Stage 1 of the undergraduate medical course at the Faculty of Medical Sciences at the University of the West Indies in Kingston, Jamaica. However I am not involved in the OSCE in Paediatrics in year 5.