Reviewer's report

Title: A survey of medical students to assess their exposure to and knowledge of renal transplantation

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Reviewer: Elke Schaeffner

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General
The manuscript „A survey of medical students to assess their exposure to and knowledge of renal transplantation” by Edwards et al. describes an attempt to assess knowledge and exposure towards renal transplantation by means of a questionnaire. While the principal question being posed is very interesting and has an important impact, I have major compulsory revisions to make.

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

Methods (major revisions):
The authors make no statements at all about their methodological steps. The following items should be integrated in the method section:
- Are the 140 students the complete number of the final year students or is a selection bias possible? Did everybody go to the PRHO job fair? The study population should be mentioned in the method section. Do Southmead Hospital/Bristol and Derriford Hospital/Plymouth differ in any way? Are they both affiliated to Bristol university?
- How were the students approached at the PRHO fair? Did they fill in the questionnaire immediately and was it re-collected on the spot or did they have to mail it back? Was the survey anonymous? How likely was it that answers were copied from each other?
- How big are the transplant-units of Bristol and Plymouth-hospital, meaning how many transplantations can be expected a year? This can be an important question since in case of a low transplantation rate students simply cannot have many opportunities to witness a transplantation procedure.
- Although the statistics seem to consist exclusively of a descriptive analysis this has to be mentioned in the method section. A paragraph about statistical analysis has to be added.
- The questions can obviously be distinguished in 3 “knowledge questions” (3, 5, 6) and 3 “exposure questions” (1, 2, 4) which should also be stated.

Instrument:
- the instrument is rather small and the questions are not precisely phrased at all:
  question 2.: the answers should better be in form of boxes that can be checked, i.e.: “no”, “yes”, if “yes” check one of the following…. (if several answers are possible you should mention that)
  question 3: the way the question is phrased the answer could just be “yes”. Again boxes should be given for: “no”, “yes”, if “yes”, please name…. question 5: it should be: “……where the incision would most likely be made……….”
  question 6: do you talk about immunosuppressive drugs?
- has your instrument been validated?

Overall it is a manuscript with a very poor (and basically not existing) method section. The design of an instrument should be a careful process in order to really capture what you want to capture. The statistician is not necessary for the descriptive analysis since this can be done with a simple calculator but for the study- and questionnaire-design.
Results:
You start the fourth paragraph with “regarding knowledge” which gives the impression that you consider the “scar question” as an “exposure question”. This would actually mean that you have only 2 “knowledge questions” from which you draw conclusions that have “implications for the future recruitment of trainees….” as you write in the discussion. Don’t you think this is a bit farfetched? Even if you don’t do any instrument validation I think it is necessary to distinguish between “knowledge”- and “exposure-questions”.

Again I would like to point out that the topic of students’ education and their influence on the academic labor market is of great interest. Still some quality criteria have to be met.

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

Background (minor revisions):
First sentence: “with the potential for improved quality of life and increased life expectancy, renal transplantation is the first choice treatment for most patients with end-stage renal failure.” How do you know? Is there a publication you can cite?

“All measures to deal with these problems must include educating and attracting the doctors of tomorrow…” How do you know that these measures must be included? Is there a publication you can cite or is this your assumption?

Altogether the manuscript is very short which in itself is nothing negative. However, some points could be more detailed and more references should be given.

Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)

What next?: Reject because scientifically unsound

Level of interest: Too insignificant to warrant publication in any journal

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

Statistical review: Yes

Declaration of competing interests:
none