Reviewer's report

Title: How best to develop the effective use of feedback skills by medical students?

Version: 1 Date: 1 March 2005

Reviewer: Debra Nestel

Reviewer's report:

General

Reviewing a paper on feedback creates a pleasant sense of irony!

The paper is thoughtfully constructed and presented and draws on what is obviously extensive experience of working with students in different ways.

It is exciting to see how professional skills such as "giving and receiving feedback" can be integrated in a curriculum.

The "concluding remarks" for debate are clear and reflect principles of adult learning as well as the Vygotskian approach to supporting learners in their "zone of proximal development" and Bruner's notion of "scaffolding" learners.

I congratulate the authors on opening this debate.

I have suggested some discretionary revisions below.

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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)

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Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)

1. I am left a little uncomfortable with the title. First, it is not just skills that you are focusing on and second, although you are provoking debate by asking a question, I think a statement might be more powerful - as in formal debates. Alternatively a descriptive, "Developing essential professional skills: Teaching and learning about feedback"

2. Make explicit in the summary the breadth of student experiences - written and verbal, in small groups, timing etc. It is possible that different types of feedback formats require different cognitive processes and some formats may be more suited to some students than others.

3. Interesting to hypothesise about the therapeutic role that effective feedback may have with some patients who are embarking on changing behaviours etc. That is, that learning these skills is not just about teaching and learning for students and health care professionals but valuable as a therapeutic strategy.
4. Relate to the GMC’s (2003) Tomorrow's Doctors and the requirements for new graduates to be competent in a range of teaching and learning skills.

5. Clarify the term self-feedback - Is this reflective writing?

6. I think the claim that "indicating the high quality of the learning about feedback" is too strong because there were no baseline measures. I think it is more accurate to state that "The average mark of 70.4% strongly suggests that students are performing at a high level."

7. The section on the summative assessment needs clarification. I am correct in understanding that only some students are asked to give feedback to examiners on their examining skills?

8. The term self-evaluation is used in the summative assessment section. Is this similar to self-feedback or reflection?

**What next?:** Accept after discretionary revisions

**Level of interest:** An article of importance in its field

**Quality of written English:** Acceptable

**Statistical review:** No

**Declaration of competing interests:**

I declare that I have no competing interests