Reviewer's report

Title: Ultimate Answers in Medical and Health Profession Courses

Version: 1 Date: 5 December 2004

Reviewer: Ernest G Loten

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General

This debate paper argues that medical educators often neglect to include explanations of disease that incorporate an evolutionary perspective. They call these 'Ultimate' explanations which seems to this reviewer to give them a grandiosity that they do not always deserve. The paper provides a handful of examples of such explanations, many of them relating to genetic conditions and to heterozygote advantage.

I think that the authors may do their colleagues a disservice by suggesting that this type of explanation and reasoning is not already common in Medical School curricula. Certainly it is standard in most textbooks of genetics.

However they do have a point that such explanations are not so commonly seen in standard textbooks of Medicine, or in other related medical sub-disciplines. It is for this reason that I believe the paper will serve a useful purpose to highlight such an approach to explaining disease. It further is useful in that it it may encourage an approach to teaching that emphasises mechanisms rather than just description. The paper may also discourage some of the teleological reasoning that one still occasionally hears from students (and even teachers).

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

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

Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)

I suggest a minor change of emphasis to acknowledge that current curricula may already contain evolutionary evidence, but that there is a place for further emphasis of this type of thinking by students and doctors.

What next?: Accept after discretionary revisions

Level of interest: An article of limited interest

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: No

Declaration of competing interests:

'I declare that I have no competing interests’