Author's response to reviews

Title: Isolated rural general practice as the focus for teaching core clinical rotations to pre-registration medical students.

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Author's response to reviews:

Response to reviewer two:

Corrections made as suggested.

Response to reviewer one:

"The results suggest that program participants performed similarly to their non-program counterparts on summative tests, which possibly measured medical knowledge but this is not clear."

A paragraph detailing the educational underpinnings of the summative assessment process have been detailed on page 6, paragraph 2. This confirms the extensive and exhaustive nature of the process, which measures far more than knowledge.

"Since medical students tend to be motivated and studious, the results are not surprising. As an educator, I would be interested in knowing whether program participation had other effects."

"For instance, was there an effect on clinical skills?"

I do not have a breakdown of assessment scores to this degree although clinical skills are part of the summative assessment process.

"Did the program affect students' opinions about living and working in rural areas?"

Yes, there was a positive affect as demonstrated by their actions: 100% stayed on for year 4 versus 32% from the local rural clinical school, page 7, paragraph 6.

"What kind of clinical problems did the students in this program typically see compared to their peers?"

This is covered in the results section, page 7, paragraph 7.

"Did these students report more satisfaction with their educational experience?"

This is covered in the results section, page 7, paragraph 7.

"The authors indicate that students log their cases in any given week problems covering all five core rotations. How do the authors know this? Although a process variable, the volume and variety of cases seen by students would be important pilot information."

This is detailed on page 5, paragraph 5.

"In sum, because this is a pilot study with a small number of participants (i.e., 3) I would expect information about a broader scope of process and outcome variables beyond performance on a test."

The summative assessment as reported does in fact measure a broad range of skills as discussed above.

"The authors indicate that they have other information, such as students' diaries of their educational
experiences and students' written expression of their interest in the program."

This written expression of interest is considered by the School confidential information and the students are advised of this prior to their application. Hence I am unable to use this.

"The second major point pertains to the second purpose of the paper, which is to examine feasibility. In view of this purpose, the discussion section should describe specific planning and implementation steps that made the program feasible. This would be useful information for other schools that may wish to implement a similar program. For example, what actions aided administrative approval of the program? Were they paid to participate? Where did the students live and who arranged and paid for accommodation?"

This is discussed in detail on page 6 in a new subsection of methods titled 'Planning and implementation.'

"Is this type of program more likely to work in a medical school that uses PBL?"

This is discussed on page 5, paragraph 2.

"What were the characteristics of the on-site supervising physicians?"

This is discussed on page 6, paragraph 4.

"Minor Essential Revisions (such as missing labels on figures, or the wrong use of a term, which the author can be trusted to correct)
In the method section, please indicate what the tests measure (e.g., written knowledge)."

This is discussed on page 6 paragraph 2.

"In the results section, include demographic information about student participants. Did they differ from non-participants on any important variables (e.g., grew up in a rural town)?"

Due to confidentiality considerations and as only 3 students are described their demographics cannot be detailed.

"Regarding Table 3, please indicate what kind of academic performance was assessed and state that the participants were third-year medical students. Does the table include raw scores or percentages? If the former, what is the maximum score?"

Table adjusted accordingly.