Reviewer's report

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

Version: 1 Date: 8 March 2005

Reviewer: Deirdre Lynch

Reviewer's report:

General
The paper describes a pilot study and feasibility of a rural general practice program.

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

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. 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? Did the program affect students’ opinions about living and working in rural areas? What kind of clinical problems did the students in this program typically see compared to their peers? Did these students report more satisfaction with their educational experience? The authors indicate that students log their cases “experiencing in any given week problems covering all five core rotations” (In “The Pilot Program,” para. 5, third sentence). How do the authors know this? Although a process variable, the volume and variety of cases seen by students would be important pilot information.

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 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. Perhaps this information can be examined to provide further insight into the nature and impact of the pilot program.

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? Is this type of program more likely to work in a medical school that uses PBL? What were the characteristics of the on-site supervising physicians? Were they paid to participate? Where did the students live and who arranged and paid for accommodation?

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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)

In the method section, please indicate what the tests measure (e.g., written knowledge). 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)? 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?

Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)

**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

**Statistical review:** No

**Declaration of competing interests:**

I declare that I have no competing interests.