Reviewer’s report

Title: Unhappiness and dissatisfaction in doctors cannot be predicted by selectors from medical school application forms: A prospective, longitudinal study

Version: 1 Date: 3 October 2005

Reviewer: Ed Peile

Reviewer’s report:

General
This study is wholly original in the question that it addresses and in the methodology adopted. The dichotomised study population may or may not inform us reliably on the middel-of-the road students and doctors.
Overall, I see this as a useful study, debunking some of the myths on which selectors make judgements and causing us to rethink how we can select students who are likely to find contentment in medicine.

Major Compulsory Revisions (that the author must respond to before a decision on publication can be reached)
There is a central point which needs consideration.
The authors get a bit tied up in relating intellectual ability to happiness. The second para, Page 3 asserts that since emotional achievement and intellectual ability have been found to be unrelated to stress, burnout and dissatisfaction, assessors are likely to avoid these measures and to use personal statement or referee’s report. I doubt this is true, because I doubt that assessors are mindful of the research evidence (confirmed in this study) on this point and I think that intuitively many assessors would presume that brighter students might thrive better than less able ones in such a highly academic course.
Contrast this with Para 1 on page 8 where it says, “It seems likely that assessors are judging that the doctor with the higher predicted educational achievement will be the happier, more satisfied doctor.” Thus the authors’ findings undermine a key premise of study design.
Revision recommended

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)

What next?: Unable to decide on acceptance or rejection until the authors have responded to the major compulsory 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'