Reviewer's report

Title: A quantitative survey of intern's knowledge of communication skills: An Iranian exploration

Version: 1 Date: 14 December 2004

Reviewer: Valerie Jenkins

Reviewer's report:

General
This study seeks to explore through a survey, Iranian interns' knowledge of communication skills and whether they have received training in communication skills. While interesting the manuscript needs to be reworked before publication. Relevant references are missing, the style of writing is very casual and I don't know whether that style is suitable for the journal. I have suggested some changes below.

Major Compulsory Revisions (that the author must respond to before a decision on publication can be reached)
The introduction does not give a clear picture of the different communication skills training available and although the authors end the introduction with a short paragraph stating that Islamic countries have not integrated communication skills training this could be elaborated and referenced.
The authors have missed some key references that show that behaviours learned on communication skills training do transfer into the clinical setting and are long lasting (Fallowfield et al 2002, The Lancet, Fallowfield et al 2003 BJC). In addition, Wilkinson et al 1999. Also the authors state that there were few survey's about students' knowledge of communication skills - the authors may like to read Cushing and Jones 1995 Med Edu Klein et al 2000 Eu J Cancer Garg et al 1997 CMJA

Methods
Again there is irrelevant detail about the University hospital and how the questionnaires were administered. The authors may like to put it more succintly. I think the number 223 for analysis is incorrect or I have misread but the authors state that 235 questionnaires were administered, 12 subjects did not return the q, 7 did not give age and 1 did not give sex, so surely this makes a total of 215 qs for analysis.-A copy of the questionnaire in the appendix would have been useful.

Minor Essential Revisions (such as missing labels on figures, or the wrong use of a term, which the author can be trusted to correct)
The tables would benefit from total numbers in the columns, e.g. in Table 1 n = 222 (but is this number correct?) also a line for missing data.

The discussion also needs editing to make it more succint, summarising the main findings. Again the authors are incorrect to state on Page 9 that "there is doubt whether communication skills training can alter doctors' behaviour in a clinical setting". See references above.

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: Needs some language corrections before being published

Statistical review: No

Declaration of competing interests:
I declare that I have no competing interests