Reviewer's report

Title: Can Standardized Patients Replace Physicians As OSCE Examiners?

Version: 2 Date: 25 October 2005

Reviewer: Amy V Blue

Reviewer's report:

General

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

1) The authors may want to provide a more thorough discussion of the issues around physician examiners and SP examiners in medical education, and note that the USMLE Step 2 Clinical Skills exam is based upon SP documentation of the examinee performance. While some literature is cited in the manuscript, a recent article may provide some additional helpful context for their work: Whelan GP, Boulet JR, McKinley DW, Norcini JJ, van Zanten M, Hambleton RK, Burdick WP, Peitzman SJ. Scoring standardized patient examinations: lessons learned from the development and administration of the ECFMG Clinical Skills Assessment (CSA). Med Teach. 2005 May;27(3):200-6. Review.

2) On the student questionnaire asking students about their attitudes toward SP examiners, the item "I found this station more stressful than stations with a physician examiner" would be an item only pertinent to the 2 SP examiner stations, and thus not provide the same amount of data as the other items on the questionnaire. The authors need to clarify if this item was used for all stations and why it was worded the way it is.

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

1) The manuscript states the OSCE consisted for 9 stations, of which 7 involved physical examination of the patient. What did the other 2 stations involve? And, they write that six stations had a physician examiner and two had SP examiners. That adds up to 8 stations - who did the examination in the 9th station?

2) In the discussion, the authors make the valid point that the SP examiners may score students higher because the SPs want to give students a higher mark or the benefit of the doubt. The same could be true for physician examiners, who may also know the student and be more inclined to fall prey to the "halo effect" in which a favored student receives a higher mark even if not deserved, and vice versa. The authors may want to discuss this as well.

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.