Reviewer’s report

Title: Medical students' perceptions in relation to ethnicity and gender: a qualitative study

Version: 1 Date: 29 September 2005

Reviewer: Gillian E White

Reviewer’s report:

General
The results of this study are fascinating and raise issues that medical school administrators, educators and certainly the general population may not be aware of. The gender/ethnic dynamics certainly change the traditional approaches to medical education. The questions raised should be aired in debate within schools and in the wider community. What are the general public’s expectations of who will be their doctor in the future? Are some specialities going to be hard to attract students to? Should traditional curricula be revised?

I have some issues though with the method and analysis that should be revised before accepting for publication.

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

1. In the abstract include method of analysis
2. The method is stated as ‘qualitative’ - there needs to be a theoretical underpinning for the method of analysis. While it would appear the method utilised content and discourse analysis (p. 5) there is no explanation of the trustworthiness of a) this type of analysis and b) the researchers' rigour.
   "Simple counting methods" (frequencies??) is not a qualitative analysis. Themes emerge via context not content (in terms of counting). Themes are not elicited although they are very apparent in the great quotations included. The results are structured in a quantitative way.
3. It would be preferable for the sub-headings in the results to reflect the themes that emerged, currently the themes have been constructed as a result of the questions asked not the answers given. For example:
   Entry into medicine might be divided into the sub-heading
   - Altruism vs Pragmatism
   - Time in medical school and clinical practice might be
   - Ethnic and gender stereotypes (using quotes to substantiate)
   - Future genderised careers (using actual quotes)

Using the quotations within the text to support the emerging themes is preferable than 'Boxing them' as each quotation then becomes quite powerful.

4. On page 11 there are a couple of suggestions made that are not based on any evidence. For example, with the finding that the future for females might be a harsh choice between family and career it is not necessary to state "This does not bode well for the future of gender equality in medical careers." An alternative might be "This does not bode well for future family life." Similarly the note that females appear to be particularly appreciative of non-judgemental attitudes is not suggestive that perhaps "their experiences have led to an unusual level of need for affirmations of personal worth." Where is the evidence?

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. On page 3 in the conclusion avoid using the word "aspect" twice in the same sentence.
2. On page 4 I assume "class" means "social class."
3. Expand on the terms 'glass ceiling' and 'hidden curriculum' by providing a working definition for the purpose of this report.

Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)

1. External and Internal (public and private) are implicit in the words intrinsic and extrinsic motivation.

**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.