Reviewer's report

Title: The Use of Standardized Patients for Mock Oral Board Exams in Neurology: A Pilot Study

Version: 1 Date: 9 November 2005

Reviewer: Karen Johnston

Reviewer's report:

General:
The authors describe a 2 site pilot project of the development and analysis of a new standardized patient live patient evaluation for neurology trainees. They conclude that this is highly promising and further study is required.

The pilot described demonstrates a highly innovative and very useful starting point for institutions and agencies to consider how neurology residents can be evaluated to assess competency in numerous areas.

Specific questions and comments for the authors are below.

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Major Compulsory Revisions (that the author must respond to before a decision on publication can be reached)
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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)
1. Page 4 states that the manuscript describes the experience at UC and the abstract says UC and IU. IU should be added to this statement as this is confusing to the reader.

2. Clarification on whether this was voluntary for trainees at both institutions is required.

3. Clarification if this was considered human subjects research at both institutions is required. If so, details of consent are required.

4. Weaknesses of this pilot should be discussed. The lack of 2 evaluators on every subject, the feasibility issue as it was suggested that faculty had trouble getting to exam, the 3.5 score re inaccurate portrayal of findings (between neutral and disagree) should be discussed.

5. The stats section requires more detail. It is unclear what the authors were comparing using t-test as numerous scoring instruments are discussed. Clarification of which scores were compared is required. Brief mention in analysis of the summary stats for the other scoring instruments is required. Pearson's correlation is described in the results and not methods.

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Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)
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1. References 2-19 are excessive - several that are representative would be recommended.
2. Clarification on feedback after the "dress rehearsal" would be helpful. Did any require retraining and reevaluation?

**What next?:** Accept after minor essential revisions

**Level of interest:** An article of outstanding merit and interest in its field

**Quality of written English:** Acceptable

**Statistical review:** No

**Declaration of competing interests:**

Declaration: Dr. Kissella is the independent safety monitor on an NIH funded clinical trial for which I am the PI.