Reviewer's report

Title: Using the Ages and Stages Questionnaire to teach medical students developmental assessment: a descriptive analysis

Version: 1 Date: 23 October 2005

Reviewer: Michael A Weingarten

Reviewer's report:

General

-------------------------------------------------------------------------------

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

-------------------------------------------------------------------------------

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

Abstract Results - the apostrophes should be after the s not before.

Background

paragraph 1 - Attitudes cannot decline - they can become either more positive or more negative in relation to a specific issue.

paragraph 3 - "compliments" should be "complements"

Results - Figure 1 (which came down the line twice) is superfluous and inaccurate - there is no meaning to the lines connecting the points; it should be a histogram. I think a simple Table would be much more useful.

-------------------------------------------------------------------------------

Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)

Evaluation - I think that there should be an indication of the sampling frame that produced 52 student reports for analysis - was it random, representative, convenience?

Results - ASQ scores - I am not completely clear about what you mean to say here. I suggest that it would be clearer if you stated that the "Agreement between the student assessments and the parents' ASQ report was 70%" if that is precisely what you mean to say. If not, I am not sure I understand what exactly you mean by this sentence. Did the students and the parents each complete the ASQ independently, or was it done together?

Discussion - This is a very nice study on an important topic. There are two main foci - the lack of confidence of graduates in their ability to assess child development (which generated the program in the first place) and the wish to increase students' respect for patients'/parents' assessments. The first aim was not achieved - the graduates of the new teaching program had no more self confidence than previous classes. The discussion of this negative finding is unconvincing to me and sounds like explaining away an uncomfortable finding rather than arguing logically from collateral data. If the finding had been positive, would the authors have worried why learning new skills had NOT produced a lowering of self-confidence? The second aim is reported as having been achieved - but this appears as a categorical statement only in "Conclusions" although it is hinted at in the qualitative data provided in Results. This could profitably be discussed more convincingly, especially in light of the 30% discrepancy between students' and parents' ASQ assessments (unlike the 94% agreement with specialists' assessments).

What next?: Accept after minor essential 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'