Reviewer's report

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

Version: 1 Date: 24 October 2005

Reviewer: Maree O'Keefe

Reviewer's report:

General

This paper describes a learning program for medical students involving the parents of children. In acknowledging the value of parent participation in medical student learning, this paper addresses a relevant and important topic. There are however significant difficulties with the paper in its current form.

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

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

The principle study aim is unclear. It is not possible to understand whether the study was undertaken primarily to compare student and parent assessments of child development, or to use parents to teach patient/child/family centred care to students, or to teach developmental assessment and surveillance to students or a combination of all of these. Because of this confusion the study rationale does not come through clearly in the introduction, nor is the research approach and selection of measures supported.

Further information is needed regarding the methods used for this study. This should include specific information on participant recruitment and selection procedures (parents and students), participation rates, consent procedures and ethical considerations. Information relating to the ASQ on page 3 should be included in the methods section together with some general information about the questionnaire for readers who may not be familiar with it including who completes it, how many questions are included, how it is scored and how long completion takes. Sensitivity and specificity data are cited for the ASQ but without information on any diagnosis this is nonspecific. The rationale for comparison with the STYCAR test should be explained and the parent questionnaire described in more detail (how many questions, how it was scored, when the parents completed it). More information on the SPOT and the graduate self-confidence questionnaires would assist the reader together with the specific rationale for their use in this study. The approach to analysis of questionnaire data both qualitative and quantitative should be explicitly described.

The lack of clear articulation of study aims and methods used meant that interpretation of the results and assessment of their validity and reliability was not possible. On page 7 the student quotes around the validity and reliability of parent reports seemed to indicate some bias in student views which was not commented upon. The presentation of the parent questionnaire data was particularly confusing. Interpretation of Figure 1 would be assisted by having a legend.

It would be helpful if the discussion commenced with a summary and interpretation of the main findings. This should be accompanied by discussion of relevant literature and limitations.

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

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

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