Reviewer's report

Title: Factors associated with medical specialty choice: Evidence for the importance of personality factors.

Version: 2 Date: 19 September 2005

Reviewer: Laura Roberts

Reviewer's report:

General

This is an interesting, well-written, generally well-conceived manuscript reporting on a project of relevance to both undergraduate and graduate medical education. I really like it, and I think other medical educators will like it, too. The hypothesis exploring the relationship of self-reported relationship/personality styles and medical specialty choice is clear and interesting, and relatively few data exist on this topic in the medical education literature. The paper has many strengths, and, in my estimation, it will be seen as a worthwhile contribution to the field.

The paper would be enhanced by greater attention to the rationale for this work – why does it matter that we understand more about the “fit” between person and specialty choice? The authors might look at whether this helps with career effectiveness and satisfaction or, if they conclude that this literature is underdeveloped, then they can make some comments at the end of the discussion about how this might be explored more fully. The biggest technical limitations of the paper are its single site and small sample, as well as the use of self-report survey data -- the excellent response rate and the clear description of the aim and nature of the work help to address generalizability issues for the reader, however.

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

None

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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)

Some opacity in the methods section (e.g., post-hoc IRB approval? Meaning of the phrase “permission of the students”);

Some lack of conceptual clarity evident in the title (i.e., “personality factors” vs “relationship styles”) and the introduction; the ‘set up’ for the paper is a bit telegraphic and could be unpacked a bit more, especially in relation to personality vs relationship styles vs other psychological measures that have been explored in the literature;

The narrowness of the analysis (e.g., what about gender, ethnic/racial status, and other variables measured in the study?);

Some ambiguity in the interpretation of the data (i.e., regarding ‘correlation’ vs ‘value in prediction’) – this seems like too strong of a claim, or perhaps an interpretation that is not explained fully enough;
the first paragraph of the discussion section should be revised;

Some lack of clarity in the figure; the authors should consider whether this is the best way to display the data – at the very least, the meaning and significance do not “jump out” at the reader, so a legend will be necessary.

Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)

None

What next?: Accept after minor essential 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.