Reviewer's report

Title: Learning while Evaluating: The Use of an Electronic Evaluation Portfolio in a Geriatric Medicine Clerkship

Version: 1 Date: 14 October 2005

Reviewer: Lori Roscoe

Reviewer's report:

General
The paper makes a contribution to the growing literature on how to evaluate medical students’ clinical performance, encourage self-reflection, and utilize computer and web-based methods. The MEEP appears to be a good addition! However, the hypothesis that an introductory session would facilitate the use and acceptability of the method seems to me self-evident. Computer savvy medical students would likely be inclined to review the website only if they were frustrated by the technology.

Major Compulsory Revisions (that the author must respond to before a decision on publication can be reached)
My only real substantive concern about the manuscript is whether the evaluation of the introductory session is interesting and useful enough to warrant publication. Other concerns that should be addressed are:
Are the 50% of students in the initial surveys who "strongly" to "somewhat agree" to feeling comfortable using the MEEP the same ones who were in the mandatory introductory sessions?
Second, the number of evaluation points (approx 30 per student) is impressive and suggests that the method is successful in promoting self-reflection. However, what is the quality of these postings? Did a substantial number of postings result in the kind of negotiated learning, dialogue and goal-setting between tutor and student that the authors believe is possible? Or are the students' postings (and tutors' responses) less productive? There is no mention of the quality of the postings, and the number alone doesn't suggest effectiveness. Third, did the order of the clerkship rotations make a difference in evaluations? Did students who completed the Geri clerkship first or second have different evaluations about the MEEP (or different reactions to the introductory session) than those for whom Geri was the 10th rotation?

Minor Essential Revisions (such as missing labels on figures, or the wrong use of a term, which the author can be trusted to correct)
None to note here.

Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)
None to note here.

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 have no competing interests.