Reviewer's report

Title: Who Wants to be a Surgeon?

Version: 1 Date: 18 July 2006

Reviewer: Gregory Rutecki

Reviewer's report:

General: The authors address the persistently decreased number of women choosing surgery as a career (in one medical school in the UK) in a different/new way, that is, they query students at the outset of their medical school education. Their results are somewhat disturbing: it appears that there may be some gender stereotyping regarding women and surgical careers that is operative before medical school even begins. The authors seem to think that a negative lifestyle is not a significant dynamic in the decision-making process that deters women from becoming surgeons.

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

1.) The authors do a creditable job identifying the limitations of their study (only 1st year medical students at one school in the UK, the student demographic for this cohort was NOT TYPICAL, a "why" as to the results is not forthcoming), but two limitations are bothersome: the disparate demographic and the fact that only one school was included. It would be critical to expand the study to include enough students to have the demographic match that for the UK as a whole and sample a larger proportion of medical schools.

2.) I am not convinced that the authors spend enough time on "lifestyle." Even though they claim it is not a critical dynamic a number of reputable studies suggest otherwise. In fact two not referenced from ACADEMIC MEDICINE, 9-03 incorporate gender into lifestyle dynamics and therefore should be included and discussed as confounding, even if the authors disagree with their conclusions.

3.) The refrain that followup of the cohort over time is important, is probably not just a good idea, but likely essential to the viability of the conclusion.

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

RESULTS: LINE 2, Change "Ethical" to "ethnographic." REFERENCE 19, change "200" to "2003." REFERENCE 21: please include date accessed

Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)

Although the approach to a serious problem is novel, the substantive limitations (one school with a disparate demographic from the country at large) limits any extrapolation.

What next?: Unable to decide on acceptance or rejection until the authors have responded to the major compulsory revisions

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Needs some language corrections before being published

Statistical review: No

Declaration of competing interests:

I declare that I have no competing interests.