Reviewer’s report

Title: Effects of participation in a peer-assisted learning programme in clinical examination skills on volunteer tutors skills and attitudes towards teachers and teaching.

Version: 1 Date: 7 September 2006

Reviewer: Dejano T. Sobral

Reviewer’s report:

General
The manuscript is coherent in content and readable in style. The format of the peer-tutoring experience described therein seems enticing and the appraisal of its influence on and benefits to the student-tutors is credible. The authors develop pertinent suggestions based on their findings. A few amendments are put forward below.

Major Compulsory Revisions (that the author must respond to before a decision on publication can be reached)
1. The numbers of subjects (volunteers, participants, responders) should be properly accounted for in Methods and Results.
2. Should not the test for matched groups be the Wilcoxon matched-pairs signed-ranks test?
3. The author should voice the limitations of the study (e.g., as regards precision of evidence, generalization, and explanatory power).

Minor Essential Revisions (such as missing labels on figures, or the wrong use of a term, which the author can be trusted to correct)
4. Citation of Figures {1(b), 1(c)} is mixed up in the Results.
5. References [6] and [7] are unmatched between text (Results) and list (References).
6. Less than half of the participants completed the before-and-after questionnaires. One should hear a word about the possible differences in personal and academic features between respondents and non-respondents. I suspect that respondents were more reflective and had higher academic motivation.

Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)
7. The study emphasizes the student-tutors perceptions and not the student-learners responses or outcomes. Why not use the label ‘cross-year peer tutoring’ instead of ‘peer-assisted learning’ in such circumstance?
8. It seems useful to include the before-and-after questionnaires as appendices.
9. The heightened perception of the importance of the planner role is of interest. Could it relate to the self-reported increase in organization skills and self-confidence?
10. A broad peer-tutoring experience may influence a career decision, especially if there is supervision or mentoring by a role model such as a family doctor or a surgeon. However, one might not expect an effect on the students’ career direction from their planning and delivering a revision session on the examination of a given body system. The authors could expand their views on this issue.

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.