Reviewer's report

Title: A Systematic Review of Tests of Empathy in Medicine

Version: 1 Date: 19 December 2006

Reviewer: Stewart Mercer

Reviewer's report:

General
My main comment on this paper is that the systematic review presented was carried out 2 years ago, and is now out of date. There has been significant development in the field of empathy since the review was carried out.

Major Compulsory Revisions (that the author must respond to before a decision on publication can be reached)
The authors need to repeat the systematic review, and update their findings. I also suggest they contact all authors of papers selected, to find of work in progress or unpublished.
For example, in the case of the CARE Measure, there has been 4 subsequent papers published which are of relevance (2005-2006), and would add the measure to the list of 5 in table 2, and as the only patient-rated measure, would seem to be an important addition.
I also have reservations about how the authors have defined validity and reliability (box 1). On what basis were these aspects chosen? There are no references to reliable sources or reviews. I am perplexed that there is no mention of construct validity, nor criterion validity, nor predictive validity. In talking of reliability, the authors refer to 'inter-rater' - in the context of patient-rated measures, this would mean using generalisability theory to show how well patients can discriminate between doctors, and how many patients are needed per doctor. This should be made clearer in the text.

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

What next?: Reject because scientifically unsound

Level of interest: An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

Declaration of competing interests:
I have developed and validated the CARE Measure, which is available for use free of charge (see www.gla.ac.uk/departments/generalpractice/caremeasure.htm)