Reviewer's report

Title: Attitude of medical students towards Early Clinical Exposure in learning endocrine physiology: a qualitative analysis.

Version: Date: 15 February 2007

Reviewer: Michael D Prislin

Reviewer's report:

General
This paper explores the value of adding a relevant early clinical experience to didactic instruction in endocrine physiology. A student focus group was convened to frame potentially relevant questions to ask students regarding the impact of this experience. A questionnaire was then administered to participants. Student responses were subject to both quantitative analysis (response frequency distributions) and qualitative analysis of student comments for principal themes. Study results showed that students perceived that early clinical experiences providing them with exposure to patients have endocrinologic disorders was valuable from the perspective of both acquiring and integrating knowledge pertaining to endocrine physiology.

While most early clinical experiences are intended to provide students with a rather broad exposure to clinical medicine, and focus on topics such interacting with patients, professional behaviors, characteristics of various specialties, and the nature of health care delivery systems, this paper describes an interesting a potentially valuable application intended to reinforce a specific element of basic sciences education. The study demonstrates that students clearly enjoyed the experience and perceived that it was valuable.

For the evidence based medical educator, the crucial question however is whether this intervention resulted in a beneficial change in educational outcome. That is, while student enjoyment and perceived benefit are important, determining measurable outcomes in terms of improved knowledge acquisition, retention, or application is critical.

Because the authors describe a novel application of early clinical experiences the manuscript is worthy of consideration of publication with appropriate revisions perhaps in the "debate" category. Such an article would present the pros and cons of the various methodologies described in the background section as alternative approaches to reinforcing didactic instruction, and go on to present the their description of the early clinical experience in endocrinology as well as student reactions to it as an alternative approach worthy of consideration. I would however be reluctant to support publication of this manuscript as a research article without some sort of assessment of educational outcomes. This could approached either via a controlled trial intervention within one or more classes (which would be preferred), or alternatively using a pre post intervention study using consecutive classes.

-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

Major Compulsory Revisions (that the author must respond to before a decision on publication can be reached)
Modify manuscript as described in the general comments so that it conforms to a "debate" format.

-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

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

-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)

Conduct more investigation as indicated to produce a manuscript that reports educational outcomes.

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: Needs some language corrections before being published

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

Declaration of competing interests:
I declare that I have no competing interests.