Reviewer's report

Title: Observed Communication Skills: How Do They Relate To The Consultation Content? A nation-wide study of medical students with a simulated patient in a first general practice consultation.

Version: 1 Date: 9 May 2007

Reviewer: Nobutaro BAN

Reviewer's report:

General

We have an impression that students who are conscious about patient-centeredness often pay attention to communication skills, patients' concern and psychosomatic aspects of the patients. This article is an very ambitious one trying to document this general impression.

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

The major flaw of this paper however is the lack of validity of the ACIR that authors used as an independent instrument to measure communication skills. Authors well recognize this weakness and try to defend. However, unfortunately, it is not successful. Authors categorized item number 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 10 and 11 of the ACIR as non-content-related. However, item number 1, 2, 12 are also non-content-related. In other words, the ACIR consists of most of the items of non-content-related. Thus it cannot defend the risk of tautology by comparing the result of difference when using the overall index in contrast with the non-content-related index of the ACIR.

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

There are several minor suggestions, such as inquiry about the superior result of traditional curriculum to integrated curriculum in depth, need for editing for English language usage, grammar and spelling and so on, but compared with the above mentioned major flaw, those would be a minor problems.

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Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)

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: Yes, but I do not feel adequately qualified to assess the statistics.

Declaration of competing interests:

I declare that I have no competing interest