Reviewer's report

Title: Portfolio assessment of final year medical students: Validity, reliability and student feedback

Version: 1 Date: 10 October 2006

Reviewer: Deborah G Murdoch-Eaton

Reviewer's report:

General
This well written paper describes an evaluation of portfolio learning by 81 final year medical students following a 3 week attachment in primary care. The portfolio consisted of 2 reflective significant event analyses, an audit and a health needs analysis.

The benefits and literature behind portfolios and the issues of effective assessment on portfolios is addressed well in the introduction and in the discussion.

The method described clearly how the portfolio was designed, how the students and their supervisors were prepared for it, the requirements for completion by the students and the evaluation.

The results are discussed and presented appropriately with illustration of comments that draw out the main points. The authors provide the results clearly within tables and additionally a useful resource of the assessment rating scales are provided as an appendix.

The discussion draws out the key learning points from this paper including the implications for future research. The areas particularly of importance include the difficulties of how assessment of a portfolio potentially will alter the content of the portfolio and thus may alter (? Reduce?) the educational benefits and learning experience from the portfolio. The authors also bring out and discuss well the issues of reliability in relation to portfolio assessment.

1. Is the question posed by the authors new and well defined?

The questions posed by the authors are not new but they are well defined and they contribute to understanding of the difficulties posed within this area.

2. Are the methods appropriate and well described, and are sufficient details provided to replicate the work?

The methods are well described, sufficient detail is provided to replicate the work and the resources provided are helpful.

3. Are the data sound and well controlled?

The data is presented well and sound.

4. Does the manuscript adhere to the relevant standards for reporting and data deposition?

Yes

5. Are the discussion and conclusions well balanced and adequately supported by the data?
6. Do the title and abstract accurately convey what has been found?

Yes

7. Is the writing acceptable?

The paper is well written clear and set out well.

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

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)