Reviewer's report

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

Version: 1 Date: 2 October 2006

Reviewer: Jean S Ker

Reviewer's report:

General
This paper tries to address a number of issues relating to the use of portfolios in undergraduate medical education and provides some very useful insights. There are a number of aspects which require further refinement which would lead to a very informative publication.

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

The research question is not defined in relation to the context to which it then relates. Exploring students perceptions on the use of significant event analysis as a potential tool for learning how to reflect may have been a more useful title for the paper or which evidence did they perceive as most helpful in developing their reflective skills?

Students had also to gather other evidence for their portfolio which is not explored or discussed in the introduction. It is unclear what instruction/experience if any students had had in the use of portfolios during their undergraduate curricular programme.

The time period allocated for the gathering of the portfolio evidence is in itself limiting in relation to the effect it may have had on the student learning. Could the authors address this more fully in their discussion and conclusions?

There is some confusion in the paper over terminology in places. For example: Are reflective write ups the same as significant event analysis?

It is not clear whether raters were given any training in use of the instrument. With a 3 point scale one would have expected better inter-rater reliability.

Content validity was the only aspect of validity addressed. It is not clear why course tutors and the course organiser were chosen as raters. Could this have presented some bias?

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

Improved sign posting in the delivery of the free text results would make them clearer to the reader.

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 of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: No

Declaration of competing interests:
I have no competing interests