Reviewer's report

Title: 'It gives you an understanding you can't get from any book'. The relationship between medical students' and doctors' personal illness experiences and their performance: a qualitative and quantitative study

Version: 1 Date: 26 February 2007

Reviewer: Tim Wilkinson

Reviewer's report:

General
This is an interesting paper that has drawn from some existing research projects and pulled together the threads around the effect of personal illness experiences on doctors' performance. The authors were slightly apologetic for drawing on these data sources, but in fact I think they have done a very good job and appropriately identified an issue of interest and expanded on it. As such I think the area is of relevance, the methods are well outlined and the data interpretation appropriate.

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

Nil

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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)

Nil

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Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)
There are some discretionary points that could perhaps be given greater weight or exploration within the discussion:

1. Do the authors believe that the 43% response rate by newly qualified doctors to the questions might introduce some element of bias? If so, how might this bias be manifest?

2. It is stated that depression is negatively correlated with 3rd year examination scores. I would describe this more as a weak correlation and with a P value of 0.19, one could wonder whether in fact there is no correlation at all. I think the conclusions relating to this aspect could perhaps be watered down a little.

3. Figure 2 requires a little discussion and explanation. The dip in anxiety scores at 1 to 2 years is perhaps a little unexpected and might call into question the amount of "noise" in the score itself, some sampling factors or maybe it is a true observation that requires some interpretation.

4. Finally, I was interested in the observation that tutors felt that life experience added to students' abilities to perform as a doctor and to learn. This certainly accords with my own previous work in this area [1].

1. Wilkinson TJ, Wells JE, Bushnell JA. Are differences between graduates and undergraduates in a medical course due to age or prior degree? Medical Education 2004;38(11):1141-1146

What next?: Accept after discretionary revisions

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Acceptable

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