Reviewer’s report

Title: Burnout and psychiatric morbidity among medical students entering clinical training: a three year prospective questionnaire and interview-based study

Version: 1 Date: 14 January 2007

Reviewer: Elisabeth Paice

Reviewer’s report:

General

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)

In the introduction the authors state that there is little information about the prevalence of serious psychiatric morbidity among medical students, but there is a literature on this, which should be more fully quoted. The authors acknowledge that this study is too small to be able to provide reliable figures for prevalence. What this study does that adds to our knowledge is report on diagnostic interviews with students, and separate out the diagnostic groups into those mainly influenced by external factors such as pressure and those which are at least partly endogenous and hereditary. The authors should comment on whether the prevalence of endogenous psychiatric illness was more than expected in this age group. They should include information for the reader about the prevalence of psychiatric morbidity in the student population in Sweden, or in other countries. This background information about what is already known would be helpful in interpreting the paper.

The authors mention that the institution in which the study took place offers a ‘traditional’ course, with preclinical and clinical elements separated. They do not explore whether or not this traditional course may have attracted more psychologically vulnerable students.

The authors conclude that it would be best to direct help to those students with depressive symptoms in the first year, because these predict morbidity later, but do not support this with any evidence that such an intervention would be effective. They report a reluctance to seek help without indicating what help was available that the students chose not to use.

The connection between personality, learning styles and psychiatric morbidity has been observed before. The following paper, taking a large cohort from the time they applied to medical school and following them for 12 years, has information which is relevant to the authors’ study and should be referred to:

Stress, burnout and doctors' attitudes to work are determined by personality and learning style: A twelve year longitudinal study of UK medical graduates
IC McManus, A Keeling and E Paice
BMC Medicine 2004, 2:29

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