Reviewer’s report

Title: Teaching students about uncertainty: the findings of a qualitative study focusing on cultural diversity

Version: 2 Date: 12 August 2006

Reviewer: Robert Like

Reviewer’s report:

General

This is an interesting and well-written article that employed qualitative methods to identify how and where the theme of certainty arose in the teaching and learning of cultural diversity, what were the attitudes toward this theme and topic, and how these attitudes and responses reflect and inform this area of medical pedagogy. Semi-structured interviews were carried out with a sample of 61 policy makers, medical educators, diversity teachers, clinicians, medical students, and other key stakeholders. The results indicated discomfort with uncertainty and a preference for more information/fact-based teaching rather than reflective/process-oriented/patient-centered care approaches.

The study adds to our knowledge about the challenges relating to integrating cultural diversity training into medical school curricula and pedagogy. The results would be of great interest to teachers, clinicians, policy makers, and educational researchers working in the cultural competency field. The manuscript could be further strengthened by address of the issues discussed below.

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

(pages 4-9): Introduction – An extensive literature review is provided which could perhaps be shortened with some focusing.

(pages 10-14): Methods – Additional details are requested relating to the qualitative methods and data analyses that were carried out? (e.g., see Borkan J. Immersion/Crystallization. In: Crabtree BF, Miller WL, eds. Doing Qualitative Research. 2nd ed. California: Sage Publications; 1999, and other chapters). Was any qualitative data analysis software used? Was any member checking or peer debriefing carried out to assess the trustworthiness and credibility of the findings? (e.g., see Lincoln YS, Guba EG. Naturalistic Inquiry. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, 1985).

(page 12): For some reason, Box 1 and Tables 1-3 were not included in the article PDF I downloaded from the website. As such, I am unable to review or assess this extremely important missing information. These should be resent.

(pages 14-23): Results – Respondents answers should be provided to the question, How do you understand the term cultural diversity (page 10)? It is unclear what was meant by the themes unsure and contradictory answers (page 14). Do the authors wish to comment on the respondent’s statement: Most are Caucasian, so there is not a problem from that point of view. (pages 17-18) which suggests lack of recognition of the heterogeneity that exists within this population as well.

(pages 24ff): Discussion – This section could be further enhanced by discussing the study findings in light of the following developments and resources/references:

Association of American Medical Schools (AAMC) Tool for Assessing Cultural Competency Training (TACCT) (http://www.aamc.org/meded/tacct/start.htm)

AAMC Cultural Competence Education for Medical Students (http://www.google.com/search?hl=en&ie=ISO-8859-1&q=academic+medicine+cultural+competency)

Introduction

Regarding the issue of ambiguity and uncertainty in the clinical encounter and medical education, the authors may wish to examine and cite the following excellent recent publications: Montgomery K. How Doctors Think: Clinical Judgment and the Practice of Medicine, New York: Oxford University Press, 2006, and a related Book Review “Clinical Judgment” by Dr. Donald Moore in the Journal of the American Medical Association 2006; 295(17):2080-2081.

With regard to technocentricism and technophilia, Dr. Cecil Helman’s provocative book, The Body of Frankenstein’s Monster: Essays in Myth & Medicine. New York: Paraview, 2004 would also be well worth examining as well as the literature relating to scientism (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scientism)

Results

The authors may wish to consider presenting their qualitative findings using appropriate matrices and graphic displays (Miles MB, Huberman M. Qualitative Data Analysis: An Expanded Sourcebook, 2nd edition, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1994).

Discussion

The need for faculty development training and mentoring programs relating to teaching about uncertainty, ambiguity, and cultural proficiency would also be worth mentioning.

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:

Disclosure Statement

Financial Interests/Relationships
Grant/Research Support
- American Medical Student Association (AMSA) Foundation
- Aetna Foundation (in past)

Consultant
- Network Omni Multilingual Communications, Inc
- Praxis Partnership
- Medical Directions, Inc.
- Eden Communications
- Healthcare Quality Strategies, Inc.
  (formerly Peer Review Organization of New Jersey)
- QSource Center for Healthcare Quality (in past)
- Aventis (in past)

Speaker’s Bureau
- Pfizer

Patent Holder: None

Stock Shareholder: None