Reviewer’s report

Title: Assessment of an Undergraduate Psychiatry Course in an African Setting

Version: 2 Date: 31 March 2008

Reviewer: Isaac Gukas

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1. Major Compulsory Revisions

a. Ethics from Malawi. I am concerned about the idea of ethical approval being gained from an individual. If Professor E Borstein was acting for the College of Medicine, it should be stated clearly that ethical approval was gained from the college.

b. Comparing Malawi students and Edinburgh students. Although the authors have accepted the significant disparity between the duration of contact of these students with teaching and learning of Psychiatry, they are still comparing their marks! For example, in the abstract, they said, “This study aims to assess……… by comparing University of Malawi and Edinburgh University medical students’ performance on the same paper”. Also under results, they said “As can be seen from table 2, marks range from 67.5 – 89.4%. This is significantly higher than those of the Malawi group” . It is fundamentally wrong to compare the scores from these two groups in anyway. Students use all their total educational experience to respond to any form of assessment. The argument that this is MCQ so it does not matter is not correct. The objectivity of MCQs is based on administering the same set of questions to students who have gone through similar educational experience. The attempt to explain away this fundamental methodological flaw in this write up in the discussion section does not suffice.

c. Extrapolating the marks of the Malawi students to an Edinburgh University Marking system. This to me is Ok so long as it is made clear that this comparison is hypothetical and that the University marking system is based on a longer duration of Psychiatric training. Obviously, the Malawian students would most likely perform better on the University marking system if they had longer duration of training.

d. I do not see how the authors will avoid this fundamental methodological flaw without removing the Edinburgh students from the equation. Removing these students does not remove any thing from this paper, which to me shows that a 2 weeks psychiatry course in a developing country is useful in rapidly bringing knowledge level of medical students to a UK standard using assessment tools based on Edinburgh University system.
What next?
- Unable to decide on acceptance or rejection until the authors have responded to the major compulsory revisions.
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