Reviewer's report

Title: International Medical Graduates (IMGs) Needs Assessment Study: Comparison Between Current IMG Trainees and Program Directors

Version: 1 Date: 5 January 2008

Reviewer: Rodney Crutcher

Reviewer's report:

This article arises from important and timely work. I enjoyed reading it and thinking about it. Once refined and hopefully published, this work will be helpful to many who are involved with the education of IMGs. However, before publication is achieved, there are some major hurdles to overcome.

1. Major Compulsory Revisions

There are some logic gaps in the article as currently written and this is limiting to the quality of this paper in its current form. The title of the paper - "International Medical Graduates (IMGs) Needs Assessment Study: Comparison Between Current IMG Trainees and Program Directors" reflects the core purpose of this work which is a Needs Assessment Study. In the abstract we read "The purpose of this study was to explore the difficulties this cohort experiences." In the intro to the paper itself we read "A secondary goal was to use this information to develop a curriculum for an intensive integrative preparatory course for IMGs prior to starting residency and provide ongoing academic support during residency with the hope to help IMGs who need assistance before experiencing academic difficulty."

It is the secondary goal that is limiting to this paper. It does not appear that the means to achieve this goal was formally studied. While needs how been identified in this survey, How to address these needs (ie what form of curricular intervention - horizontal? vertical? over what duration, etc etc) were not studied. Data from Table 1 does not include information about this. The logic re how to address these needs once the needs are identified limits the usefulness of the paper. The horizontal curriculum is a hypothesis not a conclusion. It is untested (although - for me and I anticipate others, certainly of interest, scientific rigor not withstanding).

Once the focus of the paper is better defined, more detail is needed re the survey methodology. Was the survey instrument validated (and if so, how)? Were terms defined (ie Intimidation and Harassment, Professionalism)? (Such terminology while definitionally challenging - could have wide interpretation particularly among IMGs whose background is, as the authors, state, heterogeneous). Was there a pilot test?

I did not know how to interpret the Blanks in Table one. For
example, in “Other Work-Related Issues” Professionalism what does the “” “” “” mean? No response? Or ?

In the discussion I would like to see some discussion of the authorâ€™s own results. There is certainly content here worthy of discussion. The linkage to other literature is useful. However, the “logic gap” described above remains an issue. I am not convinced that the first sentence in the discussion (These results show that both IMGs and Residency Training Program Directors believe that there is a need for a horizontal training curriculum customized for IMGs.) arises from the survey itself, rather than a prior belief or assumption.

The conclusion will need reworking once the focus of the paper is clear. I agree both from the data in this study and other literature and my own knowledge and experience that there is a need for a core IMG curriculum. I don’t think we know from this paper how best to deliver this. The horizontal curriculum has some intuitive appeal, of course. I suspect that is best lest as the subject for another paper - particularly were the effectiveness of this curriculum evaluated.

2. Minor Essential Revisions

There are scattered spelling errors, typos and grammatical errors. All quite minor, but in need of correction.

I would consider changing the title for Table 1. I suspect there is a more felicitous term than “.. Clinical training aspects”.

Was there an “Other comments” section to the questionnaire? If so, was this data analyzed? If so, how (qualitative methods?) and with what results? I anticipate they may be some “rich comments” arising from both groups. If this was not done or is considered beyond the scope of this paper or study, that should be stated.

A comment on the limitations of the study is necessary. One example: the abstract states “International Medical Graduates training within the Canadian medical system face increased difficulties and more frequently run into academic difficulty compared to Canadian Medical Graduates. The purpose of this study was to explore the difficulties this cohort experiences.” The “this cohort” in this study is Not all IMGs in the Canadian medical system but those at U of T.

Commenting on the generalizability of these findings is important.

3. Discretionary Revisions

Using a different format to display statistically significant differences between the two groups in Table 1 would have been helpful for me (I struggled to see where the differences were - maybe simply placing the “*” to the right of the Program Director’s column would do the job.

The references - while good are thin and could be expanded in keeping with
the revised focus of the paper.

By way of additional comment, the survey response rate for both groups was quite good. This could be stated in the discussion - it adds credibility to the Needs Assessment findings.

Thanks for the opportunity to review this paper. Keep going ... I look forward to reading it when published.

**What next?:** Unable to decide on acceptance or rejection until the authors have responded to the major compulsory revisions

**Level of interest:** An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

**Quality of written English:** Needs some language corrections before being published

**Statistical review:** Yes, but I do not feel adequately qualified to assess the statistics.

**Declaration of competing interests:**

'I declare that I have no competing interests'