Reviewer's report

Title: The need for national medical licensing examination in Saudi Arabia

Version: 1 Date: 19 August 2008

Reviewer: Bogda Koczwara

Reviewer's report:

1. Does the debate present a novel argument, or a novel insight into existing work?
   As authors of the paper indicate, they are not presenting a novel concept but rather summarizing the existing arguments that have been well covered elsewhere. The novel aspect of it is the specific relevance to Saudi Arabia.

2. Does the debate address an important problem of interest to a broad biomedical audience?
   The issue of standards of education and merits of licensing exam is an important issue for educators although as stated in 1 – the authors do not contribute a lot of new insights.

3. Is the piece well argued and referenced?
   Given that this issue has been covered before, the key arguments are well presented but the argument is too lengthy, there are many aspects of the paper that could be edited out as they really represent educational background rather than contributing to the argument (for example detailed description of the types of curricula).

4. Has the author used logical arguments and sound reasoning?
   The arguments are well presented but rather biased into supporting one solution which may be worthwhile but may not be the only solution to the problem. The other title for this paper could be “insufficient standards of medical education in Saudi Arabia” an issue that clearly should be addressed. Given that authors do not propose strategies on how to improve curricular standards or standards of delivery, approaching the problem at the exit alone may prove to be an inefficient strategy – eventually assessment will drive the learning but this will be delayed and inefficient unless other aspects are addressed as well. The authors’ focus on licensing exam presents a rather narrow view where the arguments are set to support the agreed solution rather than carefully evaluate the problem and alternative solutions.

   The paper invites a debate but it can be argued that not many people who may be stakeholders to the debate may come across the paper in this journal – I am curious why the paper is not published in the Saudi Arabian journal where it may be more accessible to relevant readers. The authors also do not offer the way forward. But if they themselves cannot implement the solution they are proposing...
how effective is the solution? Maybe if they thought of intermediate steps to improve standards, these would be easier to achieve and would start the process?

5. Is the piece written well enough for publication?

The language and style are adequate but the paper is too long. The level of detail may be unnecessary to experienced educators for whom the background information is familiar and confusing to non-educator clinicians who may lose track of the argument. The paper would be much more effective if it were half the size. Authors need to avoid abbreviation as there are many of them. Please note it is not Peter Ducker but Drucker and the quote attribution has been debated.

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

**Quality of written English:** Acceptable

**Statistical review:** No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.