Reviewer's report

Title: An intercalated BSc degree is associated with higher marks in subsequent medical school examinations

Version: 1 Date: 19 January 2009

Reviewer: David Alan Powis

Reviewer's report:

Major Compulsory Revision.
An alternative explanation occurred to me after reading the abstract alone: it is probable that it is the more academically capable individuals who choose to interrupt their medical studies with an intercalated degree, therefore it is not unexpected that these individuals do better in (subsequent) academic examinations. (Later in the paper the authors note that to be accepted into the intercalated degree program students must have achieved a certain academic standard reinforcing the notion that this group are on average academically more able than their non-intercalating peers). Without discounting the alternative explanation (that taking an intercalated degree and greater success in subsequent academic examinations are independent reflections of academic inclination/ability) it is not possible to claim on the basis of the findings presented that “intercalating adds benefits in terms of improved performance in years 4 and 5 of the MBChB”.

Minor Essential Revisions:
1. throughout: ‘data were’ rather than ‘data was’
2. methods section, page 1: “roughly 2:1 standard” needs explanation
3. methods section, page 1: it is questionable to use chi-squared analysis on data that have been transformed to percentages
4. results section, page 1, para 3: the description of the CAS marks categorisation and transformation is confusing, as is their presentation in Table 4
5. Table 2: it is not clear why the age data are presented as median and interquartile range, what the figures actually mean and how the P-value is calculated
6. Reference list: ref 2, second author is Richards, P.

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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.

Declaration of competing interests:
I declare that I have no competing interests