Reviewer's report

Title: The influence of regional branch campuses on medical students' choice of specialty and practice location: a historical cohort study

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Reviewer: sarah Strasser

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1. This study presents a large amount of data is presented and represents a lot of work, however little new information nor recommendations are made to persuade the reader to make any changes to their own program based on this study. The same variables are used as in any other study on student career decisions (although this might have been less well known in 2004). Further explanation or discussion would improve the article in particular with the international reader in mind. For example, a description of the regions including available career opportunities: what are the career alternatives to Family Medicine in Terre Haute; why is Bloomington so different?

2. Reference to the number of students at each regional campus was included. This would support the statement of significance of likelihood of going into Family Medicine in real terms. The relationships between Figure 2 and Table 3 would be easier to understand if referenced.

3. No comparison or reference is made to other programs with early year experience in off-site campuses such as WWAMI.

4. The paper doesn’t tell us the process of assignment by the school or what might determine an early decision application for a campus by a student such as scholarships, whether students are married, or request a regional campus placement paired with others.

5. What is different and could be emphasised in further discussion and/or recommendation is the focus on early years in regional sites rather than clinical years. Further exploration of the impact of frequent interaction with Primary Care Physician educators at regional campuses in years 1 & 2 despite the limited clinical education opportunities at that stage of learning would be of interest. In particular how the “unique training environment …… Network of connections with the local clinical community” impacts on student choice of subsequent specialty career and practice location.

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'