Reviewer's report

Title: Improving Education in Primary Care: Development of an Online Curriculum Using the Blended Learning Model

Version: 1 Date: 17 February 2009

Reviewer: Sharon Buckley

Reviewer's report:

This is a case study of the development of blended learning in the primary care setting that will be of interest to medical educators, particularly those grappling with the difficulties of providing an appropriate learning experience for widely dispersed cohorts of students.

- Major Compulsory Revisions

Overall, this paper contains insufficient detail of the methods used and lacks clarity in the results and discussion sections. In particular, the authors need to:

1. clarify how the developmental modules were linked to the clinical learning in order to provide a blended approach.
2. clarify whether the students were allowed to complete the modules in any order (as outlined in the discussion of adult learning principles) or in sequence (as indicated later in the paper).
3. clarify whether the ‘control’ traditional group were taking the elective without on-line learning, or not taking the elective at all.
4. provide more detail about how the programme evaluations were carried out. What questions were on the questionnaires? Were they Likert scales or yes/no responses? Were there any open comments allowed? How were they analysed? What was the response rate?
5. Provide more detail on the assessment of student skills, particularly how many students were involved, how they were chosen and when they took the two parts of the assessment.
6. Ensure that the results table matches the text of the paper. At present, Table 2 does not show that the majority of student rated the overall content as excellent or very good. Also, the list of most highly rated components in table 2 does not match those listed in the text. Module 1 does not appear in the table at all.
7. clarify, in the discussion, what evidence the authors base based the statement that the curriculum was ‘well accepted’ by students.
8. clarify what is meant by ‘analysis of the subsections’.
Also

9. The current text gives little indication that the authors have considered the strengths and limitations of interactive electronic formats - such as the difficulty of dealing meaningfully with student free-text responses or with issues that require a thoughtful reflective approach. Some discussion of these issues would be beneficial.

10. A brief discussion of the strengths and limitations of the work is required.

- Minor Essential Revisions

1. The current title of ‘student evaluations’ suggests student feedback rather than the assessment of student skills via an examination. This section would benefit from a more descriptive title.

2. It would be helpful if the authors discussed how any ethical issues were dealt with (eg obtaining student consent) in addition to stating that ethical approval was obtained.

- Discretionary Revisions

1. The authors may wish to discuss how they intend to develop their work.

Please note that both the comments entered here and answers to the questions below constitute the report, bearing your name that will be forwarded to the authors and published on the site if the article is accepted.

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

Quality of written English: Acceptable

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'