Reviewer's report

Title: A comparison of course-related stressors in undergraduate problem-based learning (PBL) versus non-PBL medical programmes

Version: 3 Date: 23 February 2009

Reviewer: Kausik Das

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COMMENTS:

This is a very important study for modern medical education system. This is especially relevant in today's changing environment. It has emphasised that in addition to the theoretical consideration about the methods of medical education and their perceived advantages over one another, we must take into consideration the users' experience (i.e., the students' experience). As this study demonstrated, many of the perceived advantages may not be apparent from the student's perspective which is an extremely valuable lesson to reflect on.

It has a very clear title reflecting the research question.

The study is very well designed with clearly defined exclusion criteria.

Limitations are well defined.

It is commendable that a search for a validated tool was done and when available tools felt to be inadequate, attempt was made to create a questionnaire from the elements of the existing tools. Especially commendable is the pilot run of the questionnaire to improve its comprehensibility.

Discretionary Revisions:

I have few comments about the study.

1. regarding the questions:

• all the questions are closed questions.
• Except questions 1 & 16, rest of the 14 questions are of negative connotation
• Q 1,2,5,6 & 15 are not course specific; rather they are related to the medical training in general.

2. Observation one: It is heartening to see that contrary to the frequent criticism of the non-PBL courses, majority (65.8%) of non-PBL students disagree that the course relies on passive reception of knowledge rather than active learning (compared to 72.8% in the PBL group).

This could be added to the discussion.
3. Observation two: It is interesting that though the majority of PBL students agreed that there were enough support from the teachers they felt that there were lack of clarity in the course curriculum and objective. Also there was lack of feedback from teachers. This raises the question of teachers’ role in the PBL courses which could be redefined to offer more active support by the teachers.

This could be added to the implications and recommendations section.

Otherwise a thorough attempt. Authors should be congratulated for their sincere effort.

**Level of interest:** An article of importance in its field

**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'