Reviewer's report

Title: Using drama as a tool to stimulate students in a traditional lecture oriented medical curriculum

Version: 1 Date: 22 July 2009

Reviewer: LuAnn Wilkerson

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Is the question well defined?
Pg 4, The authors set out to describe their curricular innovation. The title may promise something more. The title should be modified by eliminating “to stimulate” since stimulation is undefined and not directly explored in the student survey. (minor essential revision)

Are the methods appropriate and well described?
Pgs 4-5 The description of how the “theatrical performances” are created is very useful. The evaluation items on the survey appear in Table 1. It would have been helpful to know if the performing students responded differently than the observing students. (discretionary revision)

Table 1: If stimulation was indeed the goal, the survey questions should have asked about it more directly, e.g., did the presentation stimulate your interest in learning about headaches? In spending time studying about headaches? In asking questions of yourself or others? This lack of concordance between the title and the survey can easily be fixed by adjusting the title. (minor essential)

Are the data sound?
The small number of students attending the sessions on headache created a very biased sample. Of course, only those who attended can comment on the quality of the session, but the fact that 136 were enrolled in the course suggests that at least for them, the idea of drama was not compelling enough to even attend the session. Reporting the discrimination index for the entire class is of limited value if you cannot differentiate among those who acted, observed, and failed to attend. Also, results of a single question about headache is not a reliable measure of what students learned in this domain either on their own or by attending the presentation. It might be helpful to use the discrimination index only to indicate that the single headache item performed similarly to the other items on the exam as did in the abstract (discretionary revision).

Does the manuscript adhere to relevant standards for reporting and data deposition?
The paper is well written. The discussion section suggests that claims from other studies apply in this situation without any clear evidence that this is so, although it certainly might be. (minor essential revision)
Are the limitations clearly stated?
The authors fail to acknowledge the many limitations in this study. This is an issue that needs to be addressed in the discussion section. (minor essential revision)

Do the title and abstract accurately convey what has been found?
The conclusion in the abstract posits that the drama “may facilitate learning and enhance teamwork communication skills” but offer no evidence of these effects. (discretionary revision)

Is the writing acceptable?
Yes. There are a few awkward sentences.

**Level of interest:** An article of limited interest

**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.