Reviewer’s report

Title: Doctors, doping and anti-doping: dark sides of medicine?

Version: 2 Date: 12 February 2007

Reviewer: norman fost

Reviewer’s report:

General

The authors have responded to most of the major suggestions and the paper is much improved.

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Major Compulsory Revisions (that the author must respond to before a decision on publication can be reached)

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Minor Essential Revisions (such as missing labels on figures, or the wrong use of a term, which the author can be trusted to correct)

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Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)

1. (6,1,7) “destroys the very identity of elite sport.” I don’t know what this means. I don’t know what it means to say a sport has an “identity” or what it means to say the use of performance enhancement technologies “destroys the identity.” The 100 meter dash on steroids still looks like the 100 meter dash: just a little faster.

2. (7,3,4) “non-therapeutic purposes.” Not clear why these interventions should be considered “non-therapeutic,” or perhaps “non-therapeutic” needs to be defined. The goal of performance enhancing drugs is to improve performance, which is a common and generally accepted goal of medicine (e.g., strabismus surgery to improve vision; e.g., growth hormone to improve height).

3. (10,1,10) “Declaring that doping is dangerous” is not by itself a self-fulfilling prophecy. It is the link with prohibition, and penalties for use, that increases the risks, since these policies discourage scientific assessment of the risks.

4. (13,3,4) “not enough to scare athletes away.” This seems unlikely. There must be some, probably many, athletes who have been deterred by the threat of severe penalties. The insertion of “all” before “athletes” would be more accurate.

5. (14,1) How do you know the probability of being caught is low? There is no gold standard for assessing the actual prevalence of use, so how could you know what percent of users are caught?

6. (14,2,13) “undermines their status as role models.” You suggest that an athlete who is consistently found to be negative on testing is less admirable than one who has never been tested. There is presumably no data on this, and it seems implausible.

7. (15,1,2) Prohibited in competitive sports.

8. (15,1,2) As you point out throughout the paper, the reason is not clear, or at least it is not coherent. Consider, “The alleged reason is because it improves endurance.”

9. (16,3,12) Not self-evident how/why the “transparency of these practices” would “prevent any nation from taking advantage of their athletes.”

10. (18,2,11) Presumably you mean “health promotion.”
What next?: Accept after discretionary revisions

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.