Reviewer's report

Title: Not All Coping Strategies are Created Equal: A Two-Staged Mixed Methods Study of Physicians' Self Reported Coping Strategies

Version: 1 Date: 9 March 2010

Reviewer: Amy Baernstein

Reviewer's report:

The study is well-conducted and clearly reported. The conclusions are somewhat predictable but it is useful to demonstrate that physicians' coping strategies are the same as general strategies described in psychology literature.

My biggest criticism is that the authors found a CORRELATION between certain strategies and burnout, but in many places state that this is CAUSATIVE. This is an important, unsupported assumption. In my opinion this must be remedied before publishing the paper. Specific instances include:

pg 13. "In order of effectiveness" and "least effectively" should be "Most correlated..." "least correlated..."

pg 14. "increased" should be "higher"; "effective in reducing burnout" should be "associated with less burnout"; "beneficial in reducing the frequency of" should be "correlated with lower"

pg 14. "coping strategies that are helpful in reducing feelings of burnout...several are actually harmful" this is totally unsupported.

pg 14. "enhanced the frequency of" should be "were correlated with"

pg 16. Last 2 sentences are again unsupported; should re-phrase as "If it is determined that this correlation indicates causation, then we could educate physicians about the effectiveness..." or something similar.

Table 3. "Effective coping strategies that significantly reduce burnout" is NOT accurate. It should be "Coping strategies that are correlated with lower burnout," as so forth with all 4 headings.

Along these same lines, the authors should specifically state that while some coping strategies are associated with less burnout, this does not prove causation. For example, they have not demonstrated that using humor mitigates against burnout; it is possible that burned-out physicians find it difficult to find humor in their situation.

A second criticism is that it is not clear how the research team generated the list of 80 potential participants (pg 4.) More detail is needed on how these individuals were selected. On page 6 they state "the research team may have selected physicians known to them..." Did they? If so this should be stated. This should be
clarified also on page 16.

A third criticism is that it is not clear why the list of "physician coping strategies while at work" in table 2 is different from the categories in figure 1a. It seems they should be the same (as they are for table 2 and figure 1b.) If they are the same, table 2 is not needed as it is redundant with figure 1.

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

**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