Reviewer’s report

Title: The Generation and Gender Shifts in Medicine: An Exploratory Survey of Internal Medicine Physicians

Version: 3 Date: 15 December 2005

Reviewer: Gunilla Risberg

Reviewer’s report:

General
This paper goes into an interesting subject and gives a good example of how a combination of quantitative and qualitative approaches in the same project can deepen the results and reduce the limitations of each single method. In my opinion there are two important findings in this article: (1) Both generations work the same amount of hours in contrast to what is suggested in the literature, in anecdotal reports and by their own attitudes. (2) Family responsibilities seem to be an issue mainly for women - also in the young generation (women in gen X report family responsibilities to interfere with their work, and a feeling of not having time to do things they want to, to a significantly greater degree than male gen Xers). The authors have elaborated on the first finding. The second finding is not highlighted and not mentioned in the abstract. I would welcome some more discussion on this topic.

I strongly advice that these results are published on condition that the suggested (major) revisions are made.

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

1. Main text, methods: The text under the subheading Aim does not describe the aim of the paper. The aim is expressed in the preceding paragraph where the three research questions are presented. This must be changed and made clear. The text under the subheading aim is part of the design. I suggest that the first two paragraphs of the Methods section are changed and shortened in this manner (to make the text easier to follow):

“Setting
Data for this study were collected from doctors and residents from the department of Medicine in a university in a large, metropolitan city in western Canada. Most members of this department are involved in primary clinical work, and many are also part of the teaching and research programs sponsored by the university.

Design
Two data collection strategies were used in this study: (1) semi-structured interviews with a quota of 54 physicians and residents; and (2) a short, structured mail-out survey of all 275 physicians and residents of the department. The qualitative interview data were used to answer the first research question of this paper. Questionnaire results were used to answer question 2 and question 3.”

There is no need to repeat the content of the research questions in the design paragraph since the questions are presented in the aim section two paragraphs above.

2. Methods, data analysis: This section needs to be clarified. How were the themes identified? What does "the authors reviewed the responses" mean? Are the themes grounded in the data, derived at
through open and selective coding? As presented here I get the impression that the authors performed the coding after deciding on the themes. I guess that could be a way to do it but it must be stated very clearly.

I do not think that the questions posed to the participants need to be repeated in this section. They are clearly stated in the previous section (data collection).

I do not think that the identified themes should be presented here, they belong in the result section. My suggestion for the text in this section is: "In the analysis we looked for [predominant] themes and then went back to the original data....." or "In the analysis we derived at comprehensive themes through open and selective coding....", depending on which was your actual procedure.

3. Results and discussion: The results are clearly reported as answers to the three research questions in an illustrative way. However, I find very little, if any, discussion of the results. No comparison with other research is made, except for a hint, with no reference mentioned, in the last sentence of the last paragraph ("....which is consistent with the literature.").

I suggest that the authors label this section Results and add a Discussion section where the main findings (and perhaps strengths and weaknesses of the methods used) are discussed. The first three paragraphs in Conclusions, which are not conclusions but a summary and a tentative discussion of the study, could be shortened and, as a suggestion, open the Discussion section. As I suggested before I recommend the authors to discuss also the gender differences among Gen Xers

b. In the middle of the third paragraph it is stated "It is interesting to note women are more likely than men to work part-time.....". I find no such data presented in the results or in the description of the participants. If this fact is to be used as a discussion point it must be accounted for in the results.

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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)
1. Abstract, background: Just as the definition of Gen Xers, the definition of "Baby Boomers" should be obtained in the abstract since the term is used there. (I did not know what it meant and I asked several of my colleagues; only one knew.)
2. Methods, data collection: Were the interviews tape-recorded and transcribed or did the interviewers take notes or fill in forms?

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Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)
1. Abstract, background: The first sentence: Are the demographic shifts in today's workforce really evident "in particular" in the medical profession? I suggest that the sentence is rephrased, e.g.: “Two striking demographic shifts are evident in today's workforce, not least in the medical profession.”
2. Abstract, methods. It is somewhat confusing with the figures that don’t add up. Why are two interviews and 30 questionnaires left out from the analysis? I know that this is explained in the main text. But presented in this way in the abstract there is the risk of question marks in the head of the reader. Could the method description in the abstract be rephrased in order to avoid this, for example by leaving out the total sums?
3. Results and discussion, first paragraph: The first two sentences about the questions may be left out since they are presented in the methods section. The first sentence could then start: "In the analysis of the interviews three key themes emerged: ...."
What next?: Unable to decide on acceptance or rejection until the authors have responded to the major compulsory revisions

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: No

Declaration of competing interests:
I declare that I have no competing interests.