Reviewer's report

Title: Correlates of physician burnout across regions and specialties: A meta-analysis

Version: 2 Date: 20 August 2013

Reviewer: Anthony Montgomery

Reviewer's report:

The authors have done an excellent job in reviewing the considerable research concerning burnout and physicians. In particular, their identification of geographical and practice differences is an important talking point for the field. I would recommend acceptance for publication after they have addressed the following issues:

Major Compulsory Revisions

1. The authors refer to interventions to reduce burnout in both the introduction and discussion sections. In particular, the first line of their discussion relates their findings to intervention. However, I recommend that they either delete or modify these references. Their meta-analysis was not an evaluation of burnout interventions per se so they need to be careful as to how they involve it in their paper. Identifying the drivers and constraints on burnout is not the same as elucidating the process issues involved in interventions for burnout.

2. The authors (correctly) mention in their limitations section that they have an inability to infer causality. However, they would appear to inferring causality in their discussions of the Americas Vs Europe. The results indicate that the European sample were older and have higher response rates (compared to the Americas). Thus maybe the differences are due to sampling differences rather than cultural/economic differences?

3. In relation to the previous point, the authors state on Page 13 [In addition, the European Working Time Directive has been shown to reduce burnout in junior physicians, 20]. This seems to me to be a very selective interpretation of the Richter et al paper. For example, the first line of the conclusion section of this paper (abstract) is; “Changes in working conditions in accordance with the European Working Time Directive are not accompanied by reduced strain and risk of burnout for physicians”.

Discretionary Revisions

1. I think the results of their research have important implications for the relationship between burnout and performance (or well being and performance). I would encourage them to draw out this theme more.

Level of interest: An article of outstanding merit and interest 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