Reviewer's report

Title: Changes in standard of candidates taking the MRCP(UK) Part 1 examination, 1985 to 2002: Analysis of marker questions

Version: 4 Date: 2 June 2005

Reviewer: Deborah Saltman

Reviewer's report:

General

The authors have dealt sensitively and intelligently with the reviewer's comments. The paper is much improved and is suitable for publication.

One issue, however has not been addressed. The authors have held steadfastly to their unsupported conclusion that the candidates perform worse because of candidate and training factors and have dismissed (I believe prematurely) examination factors. For example, they continue to assert that "None of the questions is about recondite, obscure or unimportant areas of knowledge for a general physician in training, and none of the changes are likely to reflect changes in the importance of knowledge, in understanding of disease mechanisms, or in treatment strategies. They are therefore acceptable marker questions." without any research evidence to support this statement.

Fortunately, anyone who reads the paper carefully will pick this point up and it is not made in the abstract.

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

None

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

Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)

A sentence stating that examination factors were not explicitly explored in this study.

Which journal?: Appropriate or potentially appropriate for BMC Medicine: an article of importance in its field

What next?: Accept for publication in BMC Medicine after discretionary revisions

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: No

Declaration of competing interests:

I declare that I have no competing interests