Reviewer’s report

Title: TOWARDS DEVELOPING A CONSENSUS ASSESSMENT FRAMEWORK FOR GLOBAL EMERGENCY MEDICINE FELLOWSHIPS

Version: 0 Date: 13 Jun 2019

Reviewer: Brett Nelson

Reviewer's report:

I commend the authors on their important work in developing and improving GEM training. The field of emergency medicine has led the way in establishing GH fellowship training, and those of us in other medical specialties very much appreciate your field's leadership and your leadership in particular.

Below are my comments, which can hopefully further strengthen the paper.

TITLE AND AUTHORS:

1. I'm not sure that "Beyond the tickbox" is necessary in the title, but I am happy to defer to the editorial team and the authors.

2. See my comment below in the Discussion section regarding whether the authors raise unmet expectations by using, for example, "developing a COMPREHENSIVE assessment framework" in the title and elsewhere. At best, I feel the authors provide readers with some helpful EXAMPLE frameworks and general recommendations rather than a standardized, comprehensive framework or assessment tool.

3. The authors represent experts and leaders in the field of GEM.
ABSTRACT:

4. Minor suggestion: In the Results section, as you have done elsewhere, please add the percentage in parentheses after the word "Thirty" in this sentence: "Thirty programs reported training GEM fellows in the last 3 years."

5. Consider moving the current first sentence in the Results section ("There is variability in the use and format of formal assessment between programs") to FOLLOW the sentence "Thirty programs reported training GEM fellows in the last 3 years." In this way, the section first reports how many programs responded, etc. and then starts giving the results from these respondents.

6. Minor suggestion: In the Conclusion section of the abstract, the authors use the phrase "Global EM" a couple of times. However, the abbreviation "GEM" was previously introduced in the abstract for this phrase. I would be consistent in the use of the abbreviation across the abstract and in the text.

INTRODUCTION:

7. Good background on the field of international emergency medicine.

8. Page 4, Line 81: I just note here that the authors seem to be using -- either purposefully or inadvertently -- a very broad definition of a 'fellowship,' to even include "short experiences integrated into EM residencies." This is fine, of course, since the authors are transparent on what they are defining as a fellowship. But I'll just comment here that, when most individuals refer to GH fellowships, they are referring to advanced clinical training beyond the usual requirements of residency - either training that follows completion of residency (most common) or additional months/years integrated with residency training that thereby extends the traditional time requirements of residency. If this is the same definition that the authors intended to use, I might suggest they revise their wording accordingly. Otherwise, as currently written, readers could correctly assume that short-term (e.g., 2-week) global health electives during EM residency meet the authors' definition of a 'fellowship.' Personally, I would not consider these short-term experiences (e.g., 2-week elective abroad) during an EM residency as meeting the definition of a 'fellowship.'
METHODS:

9. "IEMFC" was previously defined in the Introduction. It doesn't need to be defined again.

10. If I understand correctly, only members of IEMFC (from North America) were included in the survey mentioned on Page 6, Line 118. IFEM (international) members were not included - although I recognize that "IFEM assessment framework for specialist training in EM was referenced" during the development of the assessment, and I recognize that the 20 GEM experts likely represented more than just North American programs. Echoing the authors' point that including programs across various countries is important, why were IFEM programs not included in the survey? If this could lead to the survey sample not being fully representative (e.g., having a strong North American bias), the authors should mention this as a limitation in their Limitation paragraph.

11. Page 6, Line 117: Please correct redundancy in this sentence ("was conducted" is used twice): "A scoping background review was conducted of current assessment frameworks for global health trainees was conducted to identify core elements of such frameworks.

12. The authors refer to Table 1 as simply "Example." I feel the authors need to please give much more context here as to what the content and purpose are of this table - rather than simply inserting "Table 1 - Example" into the text of the Methods. The table itself is then labeled as a Logframe. Therefore, is the table meant as a "framework" as mentioned in the text and/or as a "logframe" as mentioned in the table title? Please guide readers a little bit more as to the purpose of this table to the paper. Additionally, perhaps this table should instead be moved to the area of the Discussion where the authors discuss logframes rather than in the Methods. (In fact, results of a study or working group are usually not referred to or linked in the Methods section but presented in the Results section -- or possibly the Discussion in this case.)
13. The Methods do not discuss how the GEM programs were identified, how their participation was solicited, or whether any follow-up attempts were made with non-respondents. With the ever-changing field of GH fellowship training, identifying current GH fellowships is often a huge and difficult task - especially when trying to identify programs across the globe and not just in North America. This is a difficult task even for international EM, which is more established than GH fellowship training in other medical specialties. Without this info in the Methods, it is hard for readers to assess how representative and thorough the results might be.

14. The authors should also please describe the survey tool itself. Format (e.g., open-, closed-response, both), length, content, how it was developed and by whom, pilot testing, etc.

15. Please also describe how the survey was administered (e.g., online, email invitation, mail, etc.).

RESULTS:

16. The authors report the numerator (32 programs responded), but they never report the denominator (how many programs were identified). Please see my point above about providing info on how programs were identified.

17. For the statement "…on average there are 15-20 fellowship applicants annually," please clarify in the text that this is "across all GEM programs" so that readers don't assume this is 15-20 applicants per program.

18. I was really surprised that the Results section of the paper was essentially only one paragraph (followed by one very generalized sentence). Certainly there must have been more data collected from the survey? The current Results section essentially only includes whether programs assess their trainees and in what form. Is this all that the survey tool asked?

19. The authors should also consider attaching a copy of the survey tool to the paper as supplemental materials - but I'll defer to the editorial team.
DISCUSSION:

20. The authors discuss results that are not reported or even alluded to in the Results section. For example, they write, "The lack of field assessment, in collaboration with the host organisation in-country, limits social accountability." There is no mention of these results in the Results section. This should be addressed by greatly expanding on the Results section, which is currently essentially a single paragraph without much hard data.

21. I personally thought the authors would be presenting a "standardized" or "comprehensive" assessment tool, as alluded to in the abstract's Conclusion, title, etc. Or, in the least, a shared framework. However, that's not what it appears the authors are presenting in the Discussion. Instead, they are offering some very general recommendations and an illustrative framework, which, while useful, are not what I believe most readers are going to expect after reading the title, abstract, and Introduction. I do recognize, however, the difficulty with establishing a standardized assessment and common framework across diverse programs, institutions, countries, etc., but those do seem to be the expectations the authors create among readers. If the authors are not able to come up with more definitive assessment tool or framework, I would respectfully suggest they reword parts of their paper and abstract so readers don't have those expectations. For example, the authors can emphasize how the paper will assist programs in DEVELOPING a program-specific assessment and assessment framework. By reframing the paper, the authors can avoid falling short of what I believe would be the current expectations of readers.

22. Similarly, rather than the article providing a "comprehensive" (as per article title) or "standardized" (as per abstract, etc.) assessment tool or framework, the authors provide surprisingly general recommendations: "It is recommended that each fellowship program develop a list of core general competencies as well as specific competencies related to the focus of the program (e.g. research, humanitarian health, etc.) and regularly evaluate attainment of these competencies in the assessment of their trainees." Recommending programs develop general and specific competencies and regularly evaluate them is fairly non-specific recommendation.
23. A study Limitations paragraph is not included in the Discussion. Of course all studies have their limitations. Potential limitations for this paper might include representativeness of the sample (this is hard for me to assess given my concerns mentioned above in the Methods), social desirability bias (programs might be inclined to report that they assess more regularly and more formally than they do), any missing programs, no comprehensive or standardized assessment tool, etc.

TABLES:

24. As mentioned above, I'm surprised there are not more data reported from the survey. These data could be included in some result tables and/or in the text.

25. The sample logframe is useful.

Are the methods appropriate and well described?
If not, please specify what is required in your comments to the authors.

No

Does the work include the necessary controls?
If not, please specify which controls are required in your comments to the authors.

No

Are the conclusions drawn adequately supported by the data shown?
If not, please explain in your comments to the authors.

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