Reviewer's report

Title: Simulated learning in musculoskeletal assessment and rehabilitation education: Exploring its benefits on skills and confidence development, as well as motivation for future learning

Version: 3
Date: 31 August 2014

Reviewer: Anne Herrmann-Werner

Reviewer's report:

This study looks at the use of standardized patients for teaching a musculoskeletal session. This might be interesting to those working in the very same field. However, beyond that scope not a lot more information is gained, i.e. there has already been a lot of general research around SP and their usage in medical education.

Major Compulsory Revisions

1. Methods, subheading “data analysis”: The authors describe a mixed-method study combining qualitative and quantitative research. This is a well-respected approach. However, in their description of methods used, they do not specify which kind of qualitative data analysis has been used. There is also no table or something similar showing the main findings (i.e. categories and subcategories for example if content analysis was used).

2. Results, 11th paragraph: the lack of feedback is mentioned as a negative statement given by students. It would have been nice to know why exactly this hasn’t been included considering the fact that we all know feedback to be a crucial part of any successful simulation setting (see for example Issenberg et al. 2005, McGaghie et al. 2010). The authors themselves discuss the importance of feedback, too, but I can’t really find anything as to why they decided not to make it part of their teaching.

3. Table 4: Is there a reason for the fact that there are no p-values given?

Minor Essential Revisions

1. Methods, subheading “simulated patients”: The authors consider volunteers from a chiropractic programme as ideal candidates for the job of being the SP. It might have been helpful to phrase it more cautiously as lots of knowledge can also be a hindrance if it comes to act as a patient.

Discretionary Revisions

1. Background, 2nd paragraph: The authors talk about variation in content of curricula. However, their following example describes only differences in hours. It might be interesting to know if there are real big differences in actual content.
2. Results, 12th paragraph: A student is quoted on the aspect of the SPs being older students, which makes him or her feel quite uncomfortable. It would have been nice to see this point about choosing who becomes an SP in the discussion section.

3. Results, 13th paragraph: In all other parts, the authors start with positive feedback first and then come to negative aspects. Why have they chosen to do it the other way round here?

4. Results, 14th paragraph: There is the aspect of how peers or SPs felt about the students. I was wondering if the authors tried to correlate it with the feelings of the matched students.

5. Conclusions: It sounds quite harsh to start with the limitations. Maybe it could start like “This study looked at XYZ. Despite multiple limitations due to XYZ, the findings of this study…”

Minor issues not for publication:

1. Background, 5th paragraph: “SPs is defined” – either “SPs are” or “SP is”
2. In general (throughout the manuscript), there seems to be a wild mixture as to when “SP” and when “SPs” is used

**Level of interest:** An article of limited interest

**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.