Reviewer's report

Title: Medical professionalism in the formal curriculum: 5th year medical students' experiences.

Version: 1 Date: 5 September 2014

Reviewer: Daniel Cummings

Reviewer's report:

1. Is the question posed by the authors well defined?
   - The question posed is well defined. Contextualised within GMC guidelines of undergraduate curricula for medical students.

2. Are the methods appropriate and well described?
   - The methodological approach was sound. A phenomenological approach provides a useful framework to examine content of qualitative data, and this was given a degree of further context via utilisation of both confidential online data and focus groups did provide a basis for generalisation.
   - DISCRETIONARY REVISION: It would be prudent to include demographic details of focus group participants to provide the context with which allow generalisation to the year group as a whole.

3. Are the data sound?
   - Data are reported clearly with clear demarcation between online and focus group sources.

4. Does the manuscript adhere to the relevant standards for reporting and data deposition?
   - Yes.

5. Are the discussion and conclusions well balanced and adequately supported by the data?
   - Discussion is clear and limited to the scope of what is possible to infer given the data provided. It is important to recognise that conclusions can only be made regarding the specific delivery within this curriculum rather than generalise too broadly to professionalism teaching as a whole, though this is explored under the limitations section.

6. Are limitations of the work clearly stated?
   - DISCRETIONARY REVISION: Some limitations were stated, such as selection bias of strongly feeling individuals, however there was limited explanation of the structure of the tutorials, both in form and content so it is difficult to draw a meaningful conclusion as to HOW to implement or improve delivery without a framework through which to adapt implementation. Therefore it is difficult to assess if the data obtained can be generalised to professionalism teaching via tutorials as a method in itself, or the specific framework adopted for the tutorials.
given.

- DISCRETIONARY REVISION: The paper states seven tutorials were based on the framework highlighted by the GMC however the only description of content comes from interpretation of quotes within the data. The GMC guidance itself is not subcategorised into seven sections.

- DISCRETIONARY REVISION: Whilst a good response rate was achieved online, only 25% of the year utilised the free-text section. There is one mention (line 337) that ‘unselected’ participants views mirrored that of the focus groups, however it is not explicitly stated if the quotes from online sources did or did not include the participants who also took part in the focus groups and are therefore getting increased representation in the data. Furthermore when it is stated that ‘unselected course evaluation free-text responses were similar’, there is no indication as to the extent of agreement or correlation between the chosen strands or themes, nor whether the analysis of free-text responses was done alongside or after analysis of the focus group transcripts (It is only mentioned that the focus group transcripts were also coded by a second party individual); allowing a potential for observer bias in the later analysis.

7. Do the authors clearly acknowledge any work upon which they are building both published and unpublished?

- There is clear referencing throughout which highlights current considerations on the teaching of professionalism, and also attempts to go some way to contextualise some of the descriptions by participants.

8. Do the title and abstract accurately convey what has been found?

- The title is succinct and clearly identifies the content of the paper.

- The abstract is clear and well written, however the last line is not a direct inference of the research itself. However the abstract is sufficiently detailed to provide an accurate representation of methodology and conclusions.

9. Is the writing acceptable?

- Minor essential revision: There was only one minimal typographical error noted. (Line 21: ‘Tomorrows doctor’ instead of ‘Tomorrows Doctors’).

- Writing is clear and acceptable for this journal. Only discretionary revisions are advised;

- The last line of the abstract feels like a soundbite. It is not a direct inference of the data, and the phrasing ‘vertical or spiral’ followed closely by ‘hidden or informal’ makes the sentence read awkwardly. This could be made more succinct and relevant to the direct findings of this research.

- There is one quote submitted which has the gender of the participant stated, whilst no others do. This should be standardised (I personally feel the participants gender is a useful qualifier and should be included')

- The phrase ‘ticking boxes’ is used three times in the abstract, and only within inverted commas once, the last time, which is where the idiom is contextualised. Whilst the phrase itself is used by students and thus would be a direct quote (and therefore should be within quotemarks), it reads awkwardly prior to this without
definition.
- Line 148: ‘shove’ and ‘whack’, are not particularly emotive terms, however ‘disheartening’ and ‘shame’ in the line before are. I would suggest that ‘shove’ and ‘whack’ are indicative of the students perceptions of delivery, and that integration of tutorials within the curriculum may seem forced.
- I think the discussion surrounding tick-boxing (lines 341-363) may not only refer to the lackadaisical attitudes of some tutors, but also allude to the previous point regarding the integration of tutorials within the curriculum, and is being viewed not only as a check-list from the tutors point of view, but also as being seen as part of a check-list of educational outcomes they must be seen to have been delivered.
- Line 446: I would debate the use of the phrase ‘The consensus, however, is’, when only one paper is cited. Whilst this paper does indeed suggest that a combined approach is preferable for delivering professionalism teaching, without multiple references it is difficult to describe this as a ‘consensus’.

**Level of interest:** An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

**Quality of written English:** Needs some language corrections before being published

**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