Reviewer's report

Title: The influences of origin on beginning medical students' perceptions of rural medical practice.

Version: 2 Date: 20 July 2014

Reviewer: Michael Jones

Reviewer's report:

Thank you for the opportunity to review this most interesting manuscript by Ray and colleagues. The paper addresses a relevant research question around the form of understanding of incoming medical students' perception of rural practice. Such understanding may well, as the authors suggest, enhance selection procedures and also possibly medical curricula. I feel the paper makes a significant contribution to the increase in rural doctors but I have some concerns about particulars, which are detailed below.

Minor essential revisions:

1. Introduction/page 5/lines 112-115: Reference is made to scant evidence of an increase in rural doctor numbers. Reference from official sources would be useful to support this assertion. Data are available from AIHW and the DoHA.

2. Introduction/page 5/lines 118-120: The assertion that graduate career choice is determined prior to entry to medical programs is unsupported and argues against medical curriculum initiatives. Support for this statement should be provided.

3. A missing piece of information about the academic writing exercise is what the authors expect students to understand about the reality of being a rural doctor and why. As presented, this seems to be an abstract exercise but given the JCU program I suspect that it is not. A little context would be helpful to the reader to avoid reactions on the lines of "so what".

Major essential revisions:

1. One key finding reported by the authors is that urban students differ from rural students in some key perceptions of rural practice, including practicalities of rural life and negative perceptions. I was unconvinced by the level of detail provided to support this assertion. Could the authors present evidence in terms of numbers of rural v urban students who expressed such views, or anything more concrete than the current selected quotes?

2. The JCU program has a very specific mission in training doctors for rural practice. To my reading the paper fails to set this context to the data reported. It is very possible that rural and urban students of other programs may not have the same differential in perceptions. The JCU context is therefore quite important
and I believe this should be highlighted in the Discussion.

Minor discretionary revisions:

1. The qualitative textual analysis (page 7) did not really convey very much very specific to me. I do have to acknowledge that this form of analysis is not within my experience so the problem may be my lack of understanding rather than the authors' efforts.

Level of interest: An article of importance 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