Reviewer's report

Title: Making Medical Student Course Evaluations Meaningful: Implementation of an Intensive Course Review Protocol

Version: 2
Date: 29 July 2014
Reviewer: Ian Puddey

Reviewer's report:

This relatively brief communication reports on the development and implementation of an intensive course review protocol at Memorial University of Newfoundland. It attempts to link the rigorous application of this review protocol to subsequent improvements in course outcomes over a 5-year time frame. The objective of attempting to provide a more reliable evidence base in the utilization of evaluation tools in the context of medical education is laudable.

Major Compulsory Revisions

1. As the authors have pointed out there has been a substantial decline in the percentage of respondents to the course evaluation questionnaire within the 5 year time frame. They ascribe this, at least in part, to the use of an on-line approach to completion of the questionnaire. However, this is difficult to substantiate if all the questionnaires over the 5-years were similarly completed on-line. If there has been a change in methodology in relation to collection of the questionnaire responses this should be made clear. Moreover, a comparison of socio-demographic characteristics of respondents vs non respondents would help to reassure the reader that this diminishing response rate has not been a major confounder in dictating the reported improvements in course evaluation.

2. The authors have chosen to only make a comparison of pre-clerkship courses. Both a pre-clerkship student and a clerkship medical student are full voting members of the Program Evaluation Sub-Committee, but the data from clerkship rotations has been excluded on the basis of “heterogeneity in the student experience across distributed clinical teaching sites”. This must call into question the wider utility of the evaluation instrument together with potential limitation in generalizability of the intensive course review protocol to what must constitute a substantial proportion of the course. The authors should present comparisons and outcomes for both pre-clerkship and clerkship results.

Minor Essential Revisions

1. The numbers of students surveyed each year and numbers of respondents should be reported, not just the percent of respondents and mean evaluation scores.

Discretionary Revisions
1. For the 3 courses that remained below the minimum benchmark, some description and commentary on what might be contributory factors (despite a rigorously applied course review protocol) would be helpful.

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

**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