Reviewer's report

Title: Peer Learning in the UNSW Medicine Program

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Reviewer: Annette Burgess

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Thank you for the opportunity to read such an interesting paper on peer learning within a vertically integrated medical program. While the paper is well written, I believe there are some points that could be addressed to improve the readers' understanding:

Minor essential revisions

Abstract: I suggest that you include key statistical information, such as the total number of students, and response rates.

Within the Introduction, I suggest that an overview of the medical program is provided, for example, is it a six year undergraduate program?

I understand that all 2012 medical students (years 1 to 6) at UNSW were invited to answer the questionnaire, but it needs to be made very clear whether or not students are reflecting only on their experience in Year 1 and Year 2.

On page 8, line 209 it is stated that “only a minority (22.6%) of students found their year 2 counterparts to be disinterested in helping them learn”. This is almost a quarter of the students, and I’m not sure that it deserves a positive ‘spin’ being put on it. Similarly, page 8, line 221, states a “minority (20.2%) expressed concerns that explicit near cohort mixing was an impediment to their learning”. Perhaps these two areas of results could be addressed in the Discussion section.

The “Thematic analysis of open-ended comments” (page 10, line 262) opens with “The key positive themes identified using NVivo”. I believe that you have correctly addressed the role of NVivo in the methods section, and it should be left out in the results section (that is, delete “using NVivo”).

I think that more thought could go into the writing and structure of the “Thematic analysis of open-ended comments” section (commences page 10, line 256). The titles for each section could provide a better description. Under “peer support”, page 10, line 262, there are both positive and negative descriptions. “Deeper learning” title refers to the experience of Year 2 students learning from teaching, and this could be implied in the title. The title “Inaccurate learning”, page 12, line 317 could be reconsidered, as the quotes imply that the information senior student provide may sometimes be inaccurate.

In the Discussion section, a mention of the negative aspects of vertical integration and peer learning identified by the students seems warranted. This might also include some thoughts on how steps could be taken to improve the
student experience. For example, how would you try to make the Year 2s more interested in helping the Year 1s?

There is no Limitations section, and this needs to be addressed.

In the Conclusion, line 394, “Moreover, senior students seem to feel an ‘obligation’ to teach….” I wonder if “a professional ‘obligation’ might better explain their thoughts.

**Level of interest:** An article of importance in its field

**Quality of written English:** Acceptable

**Statistical review:** Yes, but I do not feel adequately qualified to assess the statistics.

**Declaration of competing interests:**

I declare that I have no competing interests