Reviewer’s report

Title: Would medical undergraduates seek help for depression?: a cross-sectional study in Sri Lanka

Version: 1

Date: 6 July 2015

Reviewer: Deborah Cohen

Reviewer’s report:

'Would medical undergraduates seek help for depression?: a cross-sectional study in Sri Lanka'
Santushi D Amarasuriya Ms., Anthony F Jorm Prof. and Nicola J Reavley Dr.
BMC Medical Education

General comments
This paper focuses on medical undergraduates help seeking behaviours with respect to depression. This is a subject worthy of publication and is of growing importance in undergraduate medicine. The question posed is well defined

Abstract
The abstract is clear in terms of what the authors set out to achieve.

However there are areas particularly in methods and results that need simplifying. Shorter sentences that provided results more concisely would help the reading. (1. Minor issues not for publication)

Introduction
The introduction again is lengthy and at times difficult for the reader to understand. (2. Minor issues not for publication)

The authors quote Tyssen’s work about stress in medical students but conclude it is the depression that leads to the stress. This is not I believe Tyssen’s conclusions. This may be just the way it is written but needs clarification. (3. Major Compulsory Revisions)

In many areas the passive voice is used which makes it difficult to interpret. (4. Minor issues not for publication)

Overall this would benefit from further work. Also perhaps looking at some of the more recent publications. (5. Minor issues not for publication)

Method
The methods seem appropriate to the study and comparisons to non-medical groups are sound.

The authors need to address why they decided to look at depression only and
not anxiety as well. PHQ9 is for depression but there are scales that look at depression and anxiety. Much of the work in this area recognises that there are difficulties for students with both depression and anxiety and both require support and treatment. Thus the authors need to justify their methodology. (6. Major Compulsory Revisions)

Again in some areas it is difficult to follow and greater clarification with shorter sentences may help the reader. (7. Minor issues not for publication)

Results
The results seem appropriate and valid. However again the way in which they are presented makes it hard for the reader to assimilate what the authors found for the varying groups. This could be revisited. (8. Minor issues not for publication)

Discussion and Conclusion
The discussion requires work to provide simple clear messages. At present it is difficult to unravel the results provided as discussion along side reasonable interpretation of the results. I think separating the main points from strengths and weaknesses would help here. (9. Minor issues not for publication)

I also think there are interesting points to be discussed about why different students at different grades seek support. There is good evidence about disclosure in the literature, which also addresses gender which may help the authors arguments. The authors do not discuss why they chose the measures they did in terms of depression and not anxiety. (10. Major Compulsory Revisions)