Reviewer's report

Title: The surgical experience of current non-surgeons gained at medical school: a survey analysis with implications for teaching today's clerks

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Reviewer: Hazim Sadideen

Reviewer's report:

As I mentioned previously this is a very interesting topic. The description of the methodology is better and they have satisfactorily answered some of my comments. I appreciate the hard work the authors have undertaken, but this paper would need further revision and help with making the paper flow more smoothly, before I would recommend its publication.

Recommendations:

The word clerk throughout the paper and the in the title should be removed. Please stick to clinicians/ non surgeons etc.

A reference must be given for the notion that students often evaluate undergraduate surgical education as poor (line 64/65). This is not what the literature states so this should be justified.

It is important to note that one cannot deduce that by selecting a group of current non surgeons (the majority who studied at the same medical school in Tuebingen) with the rest at other schools (with 14 other medical schools in Germany), with a few internationally, and only 67 respondents... this is certainly not a representative population of undergraduate medical students globally. So lines 238 onwards must be modified and the authors must appreciate this is a small sample size to make such statements and the effects this can have on conclusions. A more plausible approach is to identify that this is mainly a perspective from Germany and that this is a small cohort that is not representative of all undergraduates. This is mainly a single medical school (the authors' institution) perspective with a median of 8 years since participants' surgical clerkship. It would be worth mentioning that in other countries eg. UK and abroad, undergraduate medical teaching has been dramatically changed (PBL system, a greater role for community practice) and so the exposure to surgery would differ by med school curriculum and length of surgical clerkship; the manuscript does not address any of this in the discussion, nor the data for this from their cohort in the results section.

It is still important to highlight (which was mentioned in my first set of comments but not addressed) that non surgeons such as emergency department practitioners or dermatologists who currently are non surgeons were not included and their insight may have been useful given some of the "surgical" work they do.
It is also important (again still not addressed) to mention they did not highlight a comparison with current surgeons to see what they could recall from med school, as to what was most useful for them. The authors’ argument is that medical schools can learn from the experiences of previous graduates; however it cannot be taken that the results of these 67 respondents "crucial in order to plan student centred lessons" (line 214). and line 213 "no similar needs assessment has been published". This was not a needs assessment; this was a survey analysis exploring experience. If they wanted to perform a needs assessment they would need an expert panel, delphi analysis etc. The message I would like to point out is that such conclusions cannot be made from this data and so the authors need to carefully select their words, meanings and conclusions.