Reviewer’s report

Title: Medical student experiences in prison health services and Social Cognitive Career Choice: a qualitative study

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Reviewer: Jonathan Newbury

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Prison Health Medical Students doing placements in Prison Health

The paper is reasonably long, typical of qualitative research where a large number of quotes support the findings.

Abstract: (Method sub-section) refers to pre and post, questionnaire and semi structured interviews, it doesn't actually make it clear that the semi structured interviews were all post the placement.

Background, second paragraph talks about the high rate of incarceration of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders (ATSI 27% of the prison population), but there seems to be no further reference to ATSI people in the quotes and interpretation. I wonder if this reference is actually unnecessary. The rest of the background is well structured and progresses the argument to support the need to do this study.

Methods: The data collection paragraph again needs to make the point that only post placement semi structured interviews were conducted. Students had the option to apply for the Prison Health placement or were assigned to it in the usual way that medical student placements for year cohort are allocated. The description of qualitative analysis is entirely appropriate.

Results: The authors perhaps should tell us a size of the year class who presumably are all doing a general practice rotation, some of which included these five weeks of two days/week in "a state government health service"; are these only prison medical service or other parts of state govt. health?

I note that 13 of the 18 students who provided data had chosen to do the placement and only 4 of the group assigned agreed to be interviewed. The authors need to substantiate this with detail about the class size and whether all of the 11 who chose not to be interviewed were indeed those assigned to the task. This is important because the findings are generally optimistic, maybe because they report an optimistically biased sample? It is really not clear whether, the students with a 'social justice perspective' were the ones choosing the placement and subsequently agreeing to provide data to the authors.

It is pleasing to see the students found this slightly more difficult than usual placement to be really reinforcing and interesting, particularly supporting their social justice perspective about a
disadvantaged, underserviced, minority group, both while in prison and known to be underserviced after discharge. Although this paper is unable to provide any evidence about post release care. The results and the text quoted from the interviews is of course very supportive of the benefits and importance of providing care to this marginalised group of patients. I feel a little uneasy in the lack of any negative comments about the placement, about the threat issues, perhaps of female students entering a male only prison and perhaps the optimistic bias in the sampling.

Discussion between line 384 and 398, talks mostly about the validation of Social Cognitive Career Theory. This text really belongs in backgrounds or methods, though it in part already duplicates some of what is in the background. The discussion section really needs to concentrate on the discussion of results, not the theory that existed prior to this research.

The discussion text from line 400 on to 428, appropriately discusses the student experience and the impact it had on their career intention.

Line 426 to 428 mentions the possibly of negative student outcomes and the fact that none have been described again raises an apparent lack in the results section? The authors need to reinforce clearly that there are either no serious negative comments or that the sample was in fact optimistically biased towards the already enthusiastic students, given that slightly only half of the students contributed to these post placement interviews.

There is one sentence (line 447 to 450) in the limitations that refutes my suggestion that this may be reporting a bias sample. I feel it is not enough to assure the readers with one sentence when there is no evidence presented in the data in the results section.

Conclusion paragraph continues the very optimistic, positive summary of the paper. One alternate way of presenting supporting the data may by including in the confidential references to student by number in the quotes and whether they were a volunteer or allocated to this program.

**Are the methods appropriate and well described?**
If not, please specify what is required in your comments to the authors.

Yes

**Does the work include the necessary controls?**
If not, please specify which controls are required in your comments to the authors.

Yes

**Are the conclusions drawn adequately supported by the data shown?**
If not, please explain in your comments to the authors.

Yes
Are you able to assess any statistics in the manuscript or would you recommend an additional statistical review?
If an additional statistical review is recommended, please specify what aspects require further assessment in your comments to the editors.

Not relevant to this manuscript

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