Author’s response to reviews

Title: A self-report of the Healer’s Art by junior doctors: Does the course have a lasting influence on personal experience of humanism, self-nurturing skills and medical counterculture?

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Reviewer One Comment 1 - In terms of the design, the participants are asked to recall a course that they did several years prior (e.g. 3-5 years). Were they given any information to refresh their memory about the 15hrs course they did a number of years ago? As medical students and interns, they would have participated in a number of quality and safety course, and professional development, so it is surprising to this reviewer that they can talk with confidence about aspects of that particular course, and attribute their attitudes and behaviours and in some sense, skills, to that course (and not as a component of other courses/CPD that may have touched on similar areas).

Author response Thank you for your observation. It may be the case that participants are recalling general principles learned throughout the medical curriculum rather than specifically the content discussed in HA. However, the content of HA is emotionally powerful and at a personal level, so it is not unexpected that participants would recall this material more specifically than other content. There are numerous reinforcers used by the HA faculty including a voluntary reunion class held in fourth year, the visual cue of the HA pin, a textbook to prompt personal reflection and a prop designed for carrying in the pocket to prompt individuals to reflect on their personal values during patient interactions. Manuscript changes - A paragraph has been added in the background describing the reinforcing activities. The potential for incorrectly attributing learned material to the HA is added to the limitation on page 22.

Reviewer One Comment 2 - A second factor is to do with recruitment and the small number of participants. The medical students who did the Healers Art course volunteered for the course, so they may have been more receptive to a course that had a humanistic focus. Similarly, those who responded to the email for this study may have been positively disposed towards the outcomes of the course. Ten participants is a small number on which to be making the type of claims made in the discussion.

Author response - We agree with this reviewer’s comments. Both the limitation of the small sample size and potential sample selection bias are already discussed as limitations to this study on page 20 of this paper (immediately before the conclusions). This discussion also includes the important concept that guides sample size in qualitative work, that of data saturation, which was reached in these interviews. Manuscript changes - No changes required.

Reviewer One Comment 3 - What is it that sets the Healers Art course apart from what is taught about these aspects (e.g. humanistic approaches, mindfulness/ self-care, coping with challenging medical culture) in the medical
curriculum since some of these topics would be addressed and be core to modules/strands on professionalism, ethics and clinical practice/principals of clinical practice. Is it the pedagogy? This manuscript raises questions about why the Healers Art course is necessary and implies that these aspects are not being taught or not being taught adequately in the contemporary medical curriculum. I feel this aspect warrants a sub-section in the introduction and in perhaps an implications section. Author Response: Thank you for your comments on the content of Healer’s Art. Although many of the concepts included in HA are included elsewhere in the medical curriculum at ANUMS, they are often not given primary focus, or presented in an experiential format that is part of the impact of the HA. Additionally, the exploration of sensitive issues so closely with faculty is unique, and has a lasting impression in terms of collegiality. Manuscript Changes: The manuscript has been adjusted to give greater focus to these unique features of HA in the introduction. Reviewer One Comment 4: The other factor is how the Healers Art course aligns with or extends the medical curriculum. Author response - See comment 1. Manuscript change - See change 1. Reviewer One Comment 5: The acronym in the title needs to be removed. I don't think it's necessary to name the medical school. Author response - See comment 6. Manuscript change - See change 6. Reviewer One Comment 6: Lines 7-10 page 4 about addressing the hidden curriculum through the development of a community counter-culture (e.g. the pin in the lapel) is key and addresses some of my questions/comments above re curriculum. This aspect could be reinforced more and perhaps be used in the title - so it's not so much about ANUMS graduates and an evaluation of the Healers Art course. Author Response: Thank you for suggestions regarding the manuscript title. We have changed the title to more broadly relate to HA and its principles. Manuscript change - Manuscript title. Reviewer One Comment 7: There needs to be a bit more caution in making some claims in the discussion. E.g. starting line 5 page 17. The responses are self-reports and not observed behaviours. (we don't know if their communication skills improved). Author response - Thank you for suggestions regarding the manuscript title. We have revised numerous statements throughout to be more cautious and reflect the self-reported nature of this data. Manuscript changes - Throughout. Reviewer One Comment 8: The argument about empathy deterioration is a little unclear. My understanding is that empathy towards patients deteriorates when students are in the clinical setting and is better in the pre-clinical training, so the sequencing of the HA course in 1st and 2nd year seems at odds with this. Wouldn't during the clinical years have been more appropriate? Author response - Thank you for your comment. The aim of this course is to provide students with skills to prevent burnout. We have added this specifically to the introduction. Manuscript change - Introduction paragraph 3. Reviewer One Comment 9: In the conclusion, there is a recommendation for medical schools to consider including the Healers Art course in the curriculum. An alternative is to see whether the pedagogy and content is already available in the curriculum. If it is the community of practice aspect that is important to counterbalance the hidden curriculum, then this needs to be brought out more. Author response - Thank you for these comments. We have included the Background an expanded discussion of the unique content to this course. However, there are limitations to our research and we have expanded on these, and future research opportunities in the discussion on limitations. Manuscript changes - See limitations discussion on page 21-23. Reviewer Two comment 10: An important methodological question needs to be answered before these important findings can be published which have global implications in relation to generalisability as this course is run in 113 medical schools in 9 countries which is - Are the findings the result of the HA course or the curriculum and hidden