Reviewer’s report

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?

Version: 0 Date: 31 Oct 2018

Reviewer: Robyn Woodward-Kron

Reviewer's report:

Thank you for the opportunity to review this manuscript, which describes junior doctor reflections about their learnings from the Healers’ Art course undertaking during their medical degree several years earlier. The manuscript is very well written: the literature review establishes a good rationale, the literature is accurately presented, careful consideration has been given to aspects of the methods and the themes resonate well with the quotes selected. The limitations are also well written and counterbalanced. However, I have two reservations about the manuscript that are to do with the design of the study and with how the Healers Art course aligns with /supplements/ an existing medical curriculum - in this case, the ANUMS curriculum. 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). 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. The other factor is how the Healers Art course aligns with or extends the medical curriculum. 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. Other commentsThe acronym in the title needs to be removed. I don't think it's necessary to name the medical schoolLines 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. 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). 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? 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.

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.

Unable to assess

Are the conclusions drawn adequately supported by the data shown?
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No

Are you able to assess any statistics in the manuscript or would you recommend an additional statistical review?
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Not relevant to this manuscript

Quality of written English
Please indicate the quality of language in the manuscript:

Acceptable

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I have no competing interests as outlined above. I would like to disclose that I have recently become a Visiting Scholar in the College of Arts at the Australian National University. I know none of the authors and am not familiar with the medical curriculum. I will start my period as a visiting scholar on 5 November 2018 at ANU. I will receive no financial payment.

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