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: 21 Dec 2018

Reviewer: Reviewer 2

Reviewer's report:

PEER REVIEWER ASSESSMENTS: OBJECTIVE - Full research articles: is there a clear objective that addresses a testable research question(s) (brief or other article types: is there a clear objective)?Yes - there is a clear objective
DESIGN - Is the current approach (including controls and analysis protocols) appropriate for the objective?Yes - the approach is appropriate
EXECUTION - Are the experiments and analyses performed with technical rigor to allow confidence in the results?Yes - experiments and analyses were performed appropriately
INTERPRETATION - Is the current interpretation/discussion of the results reasonable and not overstated?No - there are minor issues
OVERALL MANUSCRIPT POTENTIAL - Could an appropriately REVISED version of this work represent a technically sound contribution?Probably - with minor revisions
PEER REVIEWER COMMENTS: GENERAL COMMENTS: Sounds an important course - The Healer's Art (HA) is a 15 hour voluntary medical school course run for first and second year students. However, this is a global course as we are informed that it is run in 113 medical schools in 9 countries around the world but predominantly in the USA with the aim to address the growing loss of meaning and commitment experienced by doctors. Interesting point about the hidden curriculum - "often leads students to focus only on science while not affirming crucial qualities of being a doctor, such as compassion and empathy" and that it "teaches doctors to suppress their emotional responses." It is stated that the HA course "seeks to address some of the issues described above by creating a community counterculture to the hidden curriculum." The study focuses on the Australian National University Medical School (ANUMS) with its graduate medical school that delivers a 4-year medical training program and year cohorts of 100 medical students and each year around 30 ANUMS students enroll in the HA course. The aim of the research was to evaluate the impact of HA on the junior doctors who have undertaken the course. A qualitative analysis of impact of HA was undertaken, employing purposeful sampling, semi-structured interviewing and thematic analysis. 10 individuals registered interest in the study and comprised junior doctors that had completed HA at the ANUMS between 4-6 years previously. 4 themes emerged; 1. Creation of a supportive community, 2. Developing empathy in the doctor-patient journey, 3. Self-care and self-awareness, 4. Coping with the challenging medical culture. The free text comments illustrates well the themes eg in 4; The hospital and medical culture was described at times in strong language: "There is an inherent hierarchy with a culture that can be quite toxic. (JD9)" The issue of small numbers is addressed - "Despite the small interview numbers the consistency of themes suggested that there was saturation of data." REQUESTED REVISIONS: 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 curriculum for a group of self-selected individuals who would
have developed this way anyway had the course not existed? We know the following to be true; "humanistic doctors provide better healthcare and better health outcomes for both patients and doctors [15-17]" but is this a result of the HA course alone? On page 17 the findings are then used to justify that "HA is a tool that can be used to enhance communication skills in junior doctors". Is there proof of this from this study? "Study participants described how HA had helped them in their patient interactions and helped to combat empathy deterioration" - could this not just be the characteristics of this self-selected group? Similarly the assertion that "This study demonstrated that junior doctors who had participated in HA displayed self-awareness and self-reflection

"Given the previous publications cited in references 1, 2 & 10 - have Rabow MW & Remen RN addressed these methodological questions?"The HA is only one way in which medical schools could reduce the hidden curriculum."Some might argue that there are also benefits of the hidden curriculum which will vary greatly between students. These methodological questions are addressed on page 19;"A limitation of this study is the self-selected nature of participation in both the study and the HA elective course."If that is the case can it be established if the course had impacts into junior doctor training 4-6 years later?Page 20 in the conclusion - "The HA was shown to be making a positive contribution to the ways in which its alumni practice medicine."Might this be better worded that "there is go supporting evidence to support"

"which is demonstrated by the many verbatim comments of the participants" - this might then address the methodological questions raised above. Perhaps the most important question of all and could be an outcome proposal from the study and so leading to a future study - what if the course were made compulsory it its benefits are important to patient care and self-care of doctors? Do any of the 113 medical schools already do this and if so could this information be added to the text? This is a very important paper and one with huge implications - the method though needs to be justified before it can be published and hopefully the comments above will help the authors to do this.ADDITIONAL REQUESTS/SUGGESTIONS: as detailed aboveNote: This reviewer report can be downloaded - see attached pdf file.

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.

No

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

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

Needs some language corrections before being published

**Declaration of competing interests**
Please complete a declaration of competing interests, considering the following questions:

1. Have you in the past five years received reimbursements, fees, funding, or salary from an organisation that may in any way gain or lose financially from the publication of this manuscript, either now or in the future?

2. Do you hold any stocks or shares in an organisation that may in any way gain or lose financially from the publication of this manuscript, either now or in the future?

3. Do you hold or are you currently applying for any patents relating to the content of the manuscript?

4. Have you received reimbursements, fees, funding, or salary from an organization that holds or has applied for patents relating to the content of the manuscript?

5. Do you have any other financial competing interests?

6. Do you have any non-financial competing interests in relation to this paper?

If you can answer no to all of the above, write 'I declare that I have no competing interests' below. If your reply is yes to any, please give details below.

This reviewer has been recruited by a partner organization, Research Square. Reviewers with declared or apparent competing interests are not utilized for these reviews. This reviewer has agreed to publication of their comments online under a Creative Commons Attribution License attributed to Research Square and was paid a small honorarium for completing the review within a specified timeframe. Honoraria for reviews such as this are paid regardless of the reviewer recommendation.

I agree to the open peer review policy of the journal. I understand that my name will be included on my report to the authors and, if the manuscript is accepted for publication, my named report including any attachments I upload will be posted on the website along with the authors' responses. I agree for my report to be made available under an Open Access Creative Commons CC-BY license (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/). I understand that any comments which I do not wish to be included in my named report can be included as confidential comments to the editors, which will not be published.

I agree to the open peer review policy of the journal