Reviewer’s report

Title: Experiences and Perceptions of Online Continuing Professional Development among Clinicians in Sub-Saharan Africa

Version: 0 Date: 13 Oct 2017

Reviewer: Thomas Beckman

Reviewer’s report:

1. This is a paper on electronic learning and continuous professional development (CPD), which is represented by a large body of literature including systematic reviews (see: Davis DA. JAMA. 1995; Cook DA. JAMA. 2008). The study topic is very important. However, a potential limitation of this study is that the background section is not contextualized within the medical education literature.

2. Background, first two paragraphs: It is true that an advantage of e-learning in the form of online CPD is an ability to reach non-traditional and distance learners. However, there have been previous studies on this topic (example: Frehywot S. Human Resources for Health. 2013). It would be helpful for the authors to cite these studies and provide further argumentation regarding how their study addresses an important gap.

3. Background, last paragraph: The authors state that much of the CPD literature involves knowledge acquisition as opposed to learner preferences. However, this may not be entirely true. A MEDLINE search of "continuous medical education (exploded term)" combined "learning preferences (exact words)" yields 18 studies. Perusing these titles reveals relevant articles that could be cited in this paper.

4. Methods, first paragraph: Please describe how the "convenience sample" was determined and details regarding its composition of HCW students.

5. Methods, first paragraph: invitations were e-mailed to 1,600 HCW students from 2012-2016. How many HCW students existed over that timeframe?

6. Methods, lines 112-120: What was the basis for determining the content of the survey items? Please insert details regarding survey, such as numbers of items and scales, within the text of the methods section.

7. Methods, lines 112-120: Is there validity evidence for the survey instrument scores?

8. Results, line 126: The response rate is very low at 29%.

9. Results, line 126: The authors are encouraged to compare demographic and other characteristics - which should be available from the course directors - of survey respondents and non-respondents to possibly mitigate the low response rate.
10. Results, lines 170-172: It is stated that an open-ended query was administered and that key themes were reported; yet the abstract indicates that the study utilized "simplified grounded theory." Please provide more details regarding the qualitative methodology utilized in study. How were the "key themes" identified and abstracted? How many investigators were involved in the thematic analysis? How were discrepancies resolved?

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