

Reviewer's report

Title: Health inequalities, physician citizens and professional medical associations: An Australian case study

Version: 2 Date: 18 April 2007

Reviewer: Robert Ferrer

Reviewer's report:

General

The paper takes on an important topic that has received too little attention, namely the response of professional academies and societies to health inequalities. Through qualitative study, it provides an interesting window into how organized medicine and practicing clinicians see their role in fostering social justice. I have not seen a similar empirical study. The findings are noteworthy for describing the respondents' notions about the limits to professional responsibility. It is thoughtful and well written. I have only a few suggestions for revisions.

Major Compulsory Revisions (that the author must respond to before a decision on publication can be reached)

Minor Essential Revisions (such as missing labels on figures, or the wrong use of a term, which the author can be trusted to correct)

Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)

1. More detail on the qualitative analysis is necessary for the reader to understand how the themes and interpretations were developed from the raw data. Was there any attempt to "check back" the identified themes and interpretations with the respondents?
2. The authors explain the findings in terms of ethical frameworks, such as a care/compassion vs. social justice, but the quotations from the respondents also reveal that economic self-interest accounts for some of the positions taken, for example on financial access. The role of economic considerations in physicians' response -- or lack of response -- to social justice issues should be explicitly considered in the discussion. Being open and explicit about this issue will help to resolve some of the inconsistencies in colleges' positions, for example that opinions on nuclear disarmament are within their purview, yet encouraging outreach to disadvantaged persons living in their practitioners' own communities is not. There are value frameworks embedded in the economic issues as well and these should be considered.

What next?: Accept after discretionary revisions

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

Declaration of competing interests:

I declare that I have no competing interests.