Reviewer's report

Title: Geriatric assessment in undergraduate geriatric education - a structured interpretation guide improves the quantity and accuracy of the results: a cohort comparison

Version: 2 Date: 8 January 2013

Reviewer: Masami Tagawa

Reviewer's report:

In this manuscript, the authors describe a positive effect of the use of a guide for assessment of elderly patients in comparison with that by students who did not use the guide. Learning how to assess elderly patients is becoming increasingly important in undergraduate medical education, and this research will provide a useful tool for geriatric medicine education.

Major Compulsory Revisions

Methods

1. The authors used two cohort groups, an intervention group (checklist group) and a control group (non-checklist group); the control group took clerkships one or two years prior to the intervention group. The authors should mention that the two groups studied in different classes in different years, and discuss the many possible threats to the internal validity associated with this research design. These threats should also be mentioned in the section about 'Strengths and Limitations'.

2. The control group students were asked to undertake comprehensive geriatric assessment (CGA), and instructed to 'interpret the findings and make conclusion by very general open questions.' Meanwhile, the checklist group students were ‘asked to think about further diagnosis, counseling, treatment, and referral, if necessary’ when the checklist was introduced to this group. It is not clear whether the control group received instruction regarding CGA equivalent to that of the checklist group. If there was no or insufficient instruction of CGA for the control group, the higher learning outcomes of the checklist group may have been caused by all the instructions related to geriatric patient care. The authors should explain the educational background of both groups and discuss the effect of the guide carefully.

3. The authors described “all patients consented to the anonymous use of their data for epidemiological research.” This manuscript is not about epidemiological research, but educational research. In addition, more than 10% of patients had dementia. A well-considered explanation is required for the ethical handling of data collection and use.

Discussion

4. The authors said that the subjective evaluation might be the reason for the
unimproved grade of students. To reach such a conclusion, the authors should explain what kinds of behaviors were assessed in the whole clerkship, and why students were subjectively assessed.

5. The guide in this research does not have the function of a portfolio, so a more accurate description is required.

Minor Essential Revisions

Background, Methods

1. The authors used the terms ‘comprehensive geriatric assessment’, ‘geriatric assessment tool’, STEP, STEP-assessment, structured interpretation guide, and checklist-tool. Please define these terms when initially mentioning them in the manuscript, and use them in consistent and appropriate ways.

2. The explanation of ‘Instrument’ is also unclear.

**Level of interest:** An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

**Quality of written English:** Needs some language corrections before being published

**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' below.