Reviewer’s report

Title: Experience as a doctor in the developing world: does it benefit the clinical and organisational performance in general practice?

Version: 2 Date: 17 November 2009

Reviewer: Martin Gulliford

Reviewer’s report:

This paper asks whether experience in a developing country is associated with doctors' later practice in primary care. This is an interesting and novel question. The two analyses are for 517 GPs and 1004 GPs respectively. The data for international experience are linked to data for clinical and organisational measures. The analysis and presentation of the data are appropriate. The paper is clearly written. The conclusions are appropriately cautious 'We found interesting differences in clinical and organisational performance between GP’s with and without medical experience in developing countries and between their practices. It is not possible to attribute these differences to this experience, because the choice for medical experience in a tropical country probably reflects individual differences in professional motivation and personality.' (Abstract). And 'Experience in developing countries after graduation does not result in substantial differences in general practice performance compared to primary care physicians without such career.' (p10)

The reviewer’s main concerns are that 'The databases used probably cannot provide the information needed'. However, the paper only presents an analysis of the information available and this acknowledged in the paper. The reviewer is also concerned that 'No particularly convincing explanation is given for the other quality associations and one doubts their true significance.' However, the paper acknowledges that 'The large number of indicators (n=385) regarding the practice management may have increased the chance of finding accidentally significant differences.' (p10)

Overall, in view of the interest of the paper and the appropriate reservations expressed by the authors concerning their findings, this paper appears to be acceptable for BMC Family Practice.