Reviewer's report

Title: Is there really a Pot of Gold at the end of the Rainbow? Has the Occupational Specific Dispensation, as a mechanism to attract and retain Health Workers in South Africa, leveled the playing field?

Version: 2 Date: 29 June 2012

Reviewer: David Stuckler

Reviewer's report:

The authors have addressed most of my comments. The paper is much better written and improved.

Minro essential revisions

- The added tables are helpful, although it is difficult to read Table 4. Perhaps restructure the columns so that they line up?

- A few remaining points are to incorporate the data in the abstract on the pre/post OSD, as the current phrasing is not informative: “Salaries of most South African HRH are dwarfed by their international counterparts, although the OSD has gone some way to reduce that disparity”.

- The writing is greatly improved but signposting could greatly improve readability (particularly in the introduction) where it is difficult to understand. It would help to justify the country choices and harmonisation up front on p. 10 before going into the methods as this is central to what the study is doing (I realise it’s on p. 12).

- The term HRH is still somewhat confusing as it appears to lump together doctors and nurses. How do we interpret the conclusion that medical officers surpassed their HRH counterparts on p. 18?

- Would the authors recommend other countries implement laws like OSD? It seems groups like the International Monetary Fund, which put publics wage-ceilings, limit scope for OSD-type laws? This might be worth noting in the conclusion to widen the relevance of the report.

- Perhaps simply clarify in the conclusion that future research could evaluate the push factors described on p. 18? A key point is that nurses salaries are still about half that of the UK but medical officers improved greatly to converge with the UK (based on Table 1), so that if there are remaining shortages of doctors it is likely to reflect push factors – perhaps worth noting in the conclusion and abstract? Why did nurses fare less well?

- Finally, this is inasmuch a research paper as a descriptive policy analysis, since there is no hypothesis, which makes the structured format a less good fit for the content. Perhaps BMC editors can release as a policy piece?

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