Reviewer's report

Title: A Survey of Health Professions Students for Knowledge, Attitudes, and Confidence about Tuberculosis, 2005

Version: 2 Date: 26 June 2007

Reviewer: Anthony Harries

Reviewer's report:

General

This is a well written paper providing base line information from health profession students about their knowledge, attitudes and confidence about tuberculosis (TB).

By themselves these data are of some, but not major, interest. Of more interest would be a comparison of knowledge, attitudes and confidence both BEFORE and AFTER the National Tuberculosis Training tools had been employed and used in the Training establishments. The “AFTER” is about to be carried out this year, and I would have thought the paper would be strengthened by waiting for these data. I have mentioned this again in the discretionary revisions.

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

1. Methods. More details should be provided about how students came to fill in the questionnaire. The response rate was only 50%, so some explanation needs to be given about why this was not higher. TB is of major public health importance, so why was the response rate only 8% from the Public Health Discipline?

2. Results - Table 3. I do not see the point of this table and it does not fit in well into the subject matter. If the authors want to look at some differences between foreign born and US/Canada born students, then they should look at the base line differences (ie higher rates of LTBI, BCG etc in foreign borns) and compare the two groups in terms of their knowledge, attitudes and confidence about TB.

3. Results - Table 4 is unnecessarily complicated. Better to have just agree or disagree, and this would enable the reader to more clearly see the answers.

4. Results - Table 5. The authors should provide in a legend the explanation for the different abbreviations used (ie PA, BSN, etc).

5. Discussion. Page 8. Authors state that their belief that TB specific information between foreign born and US/Canada born would be different was confirmed, but that responses did not differ between the 2 groups. Maybe I missed it, but there was nothing in the results commenting on differences in knowledge, attitudes and
confidence between the 2 groups.

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

Discussion. Page 10, first para, last sentence – not clear and the sentence needs re-writing

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Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)

1. By themselves these data are of some, but not major, interest. Of more interest would be a comparison of knowledge, attitudes and confidence both BEFORE and AFTER the National Tuberculosis Training tools had been employed and used in the Training establishments. The “AFTER” is about to be carried out this year, and I would have thought the paper would be strengthened by waiting for these data. If the authors do decide to go ahead, maybe they can justify why they do not wait - ? length of time to conduct the next exercise.

2. One has to question the selection of questions used to determine knowledge. For example, health professional students who are about to complete their studies should know and possibly be asked about a) protective measures in health care settings when dealing with a case of tuberculosis, b) how to recognise a suspect case of tuberculosis, c) how to diagnose pulmonary tuberculosis, d) aspects of chemotherapy, etc. I am surprised these types of questions were not included

Anthony D Harries, Ministry of Health, Malawi

What next?: Unable to decide on acceptance or rejection until the authors have responded to the major compulsory revisions

Level of interest: An article of limited interest

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,

AD Harries