Reviewer's report

Title: Retention rate of physicians in public health administration and their career path in Japan

Version: 1 Date: 19 February 2010

Reviewer: Martha Macleod

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Discretionary Revisions (which are recommendations for improvement but which the author can choose to ignore)

1. Background: Although it is indeed the case that physicians who serve as public health specialists play significant roles, it is not self-evident what constitute these roles within the public health administrative agencies, or why the roles are particularly important. Clarification of this point and a slight expansion of the context of their work (i.e. what public health physicians actually do in the course of their work) would be important to have in the Background section. Without this clarification, it is not evident why hiring non-physicians as directors is problematic. Without this explication, some unanswered questions arise later in the manuscript … E.g. if the roles played by public health physicians are primarily administrative, then what would keep clinically-minded physicians in the role, particularly early in their careers? Do the working conditions (e.g. workplace hours) of public health physicians contribute to their being more women in these roles? It might be helpful to address these latter two questions on pages 8-9 in the discussion.

2. Method: It is not clear why pediatric and obstetrics/gynecology specialists were selected for comparison. This would be helpful.

3. Discussion: On page 8, the first paragraph beginning, “In the United States….” is extraneous and it is unclear why these points are being made. The first four sentences could be deleted without losing substance. If they are retained, it is important that they be reframed in the context of the argument. The last two sentences in that paragraph, “In Japan, it seems necessary…”, would flow more logically if they were included in the discussion on page 9 about retaining and ensuring the quality of public health physicians.

4. Discussion: On page 9, the “approaches” named are more like goals than approaches. How are the particular approaches being enacted?

5. Discussion: Other questions arise here. For example, Do roles for public health physicians in administration need to be reviewed in order to make them more attractive to younger physicians?

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

1. Background: There needs to be some clarification at the beginning of the
manuscript re public health administration roles. Providing such a context is a necessary basis for the interpretation of findings for non-Japanese readers. Only a sentence or two are needed.

2. Method: There is a typo in the 1994 numbers? Should it be 227,775?

3. Method: Clarification is needed on p. 4 in the last sentence of the paragraph that begins, “To assess the current status….” about whether the physicians reported namely, “physicians employed by government agencies” are the same as “physicians in public health administration agencies”. Do physicians employed in government agencies include other physicians as well?

4. Discussion: On page 7, last sentence that begins, “However, from the perspective…” should the sentence refer to “the quality of public health services rather than to the “quality of public health physicians”?

5. Discussion: On page 9, it is not clear why the graduates working temporarily in public health administration would be “pushing down the retention rate”. Rewording of the sentence is needed.


The Manuscript overall is coherent and sound. The soundness of the argument would be improved with attention to explicating the context and addressing the minor issues identified above.

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

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