Reviewer's report

Title: Can Foreign-Trained Dentists Address Workforce Shortages and Improve Access to Care for Vulnerable Populations in the United States? A Case Study from Washington State

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Reviewer: Jenny Gallagher

Reviewer's report:

Overall
This is an important analysis of health workforce data which has implications for access to healthcare in the longer term in light of global workforce movement. This paper needs mainly minor essential revisions but with a little further work it should make a helpful contribution to the published literature.

A. Minor essential revisions

1. Is the question posed by the authors well defined?
   a. The objectives and hypotheses being tested are clearly stated in the text. However, the aim could be stated more clearly in the abstract.

2. Are the methods appropriate and well described?
   b. Greater clarity of method of matching data across systems is required – was it possible to match all data? There is no reference to cases being removed so presumably this was possible.

3. Are the data sound?
   c. They appear to be sound.

4. Does the manuscript adhere to the relevant standards for reporting and data deposition?
   d. Generally yes.

5. Are the discussion and conclusions well balanced and adequately supported by the data?
   e. Data matching is fraught with difficulty – however, no difficulties are discussed here. Insight to this issue and how any difficulties were managed would be helpful to future researcher who may wish to replicate the methods in a different state.
   f. Is it possible to relate the findings to how newly trained dentists obtain their jobs. Could it be that the newly licensed dentists might still obtain a Medicaid? Could this have been ‘in process’ for any of the sample? How are they introduced to Medicaid? Could this make any difference?
   g. Any discussion of workforce flows should discuss the impact on the country of
origin and it is good to see this is well handled. And further issues such as student debt, family issues etc are also recognised.

h. The majority of foreign trained dentists are female – the authors may wish to discuss what the possible implications or make recommendations for further research?

i. Suggest exploring further research – perhaps qualitative – to explore the underlying issues presented by these findings. Do they understand the Medicaid system, its aims and also how it works? How and why they are attracted to work in certain areas and not in others? What, if anything could be done to help them explore other options in support of good workforce planning and achieving goals regarding access to dental care.

6. Are limitations of the work clearly stated?

j. Partially – this section of the discussion could be addressed further in light of the response to ‘e’ above.

7. Do the authors clearly acknowledge any work upon which they are building, both published and unpublished?

k. Yes.

8. Do the title and abstract accurately convey what has been found?

l. Yes, although you may wish to turn the title into a statement exploring ‘the potential’

9. Is the writing acceptable?

m. Overall, this is an interesting, clearly written and important research paper which raises questions for health service planning.

B. Minor revisions

a. Overall: There are a few typos which the authors can address including ‘data’ being pleural.

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

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'