Reviewer's report

Title: An emigration versus a globalization perspective of the Lebanese physician workforce: a qualitative study

Version: 1 Date: 19 December 2011

Reviewer: Marta van Zanten

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These are discretionary revisions

1. Is the question posed by the authors well defined?

More background data is needed on the current state of the workforce in Lebanon. The authors state that Lebanon has a surplus of physicians, and provide a reference. I would suggest that to better put this study into context, the authors need to add more data to the text explicitly describing the current workforce in Lebanon. The authors indicate that the physician density in Lebanon is comparable to the United States, and they also state that there is an “oversaturation of the local physician job market.” It is therefore unclear if this is the authors’ opinion, rather than being based on published data. It is also unclear if Lebanon suffers from a mal-distribution of physicians, rather than a simple oversupply. Are there areas in Lebanon without sufficient physicians?

Background

The first reference was published in 2005, but the authors use it to describe significant increase in physician emigration in “recent years”. Do the authors have any more up to date publications, since data from a 2005 publication was likely collected at least 8 years ago? Reference #2 in the text should be referred to as an unpublished survey.

A more detailed description of the lack of an accreditation system for medical schools is needed. For example, please explain the role of the Equivalence Committee and the Technical Committee of the Ministry of Education and Higher Education in Lebanon, and how the processes of these committees to evaluate and audit education programs is not considered by the paper authors to constitute an accreditation review of the medical schools in Lebanon.

2. Are the methods appropriate and well described?

More explanation is needed as to why the authors consider deans of medical schools to be “policy makers”. Do these deans have an influence at the country level regarding workforce issues? Or do the authors consider deans to have an influence in policy only in the numbers of students admitted into their respective medical schools?

Please explain how the dean of the Lebanese American University was included in this study, since the school did not begin instruction until 2009, but the interviews for this study took place in the summer of 2008.
3. Are the data sound?

If the authors know that there is an increase in emigration from Lebanon, they should include in the text actual data to quantify this assertion. It is unclear to the reader of this article if the guesses of the survey respondents of 25% - 50% emigration are accurate.

How many postgraduate spots are there in Lebanon? How many physicians apply for each spot? Such data would support the authors’ claims of oversaturation and lack of training opportunities for domestic graduates.

Do all Lebanese medical schools receive public funds? What proportion of a student’s education is paid by the student? Is this the same for the private and the public schools?

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

Yes.

5. Are the discussion and conclusions well balanced and adequately supported by the data?

Regarding the answers provided by the medical school deans, more interpretation of their survey responses based on medical school variables is needed. For example, do the deans perceive that students from the schools with instruction in French have different emigration patterns compared with students who studied in English? Are there differences in the students from the public versus the private schools or based on degree granted?

The authors’ point that there is a lack of a national plan for human resources for health is a key point that should be emphasized and mentioned earlier in the paper.

Do the authors have data to support the assertion that the best graduates leave the country, or is this opinion? For example, is there relevant data from the “colloquium exam” that address this question?

6. Are limitations of the work clearly stated?

Only one limitation is mentioned.

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

Yes

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

See points mentioned above.

9. Is the writing acceptable?

Yes the writing is generally acceptable.

In the Abstract, last line of the Results section, “along” should be “of”.

On page 13, more explanation of North American Institutions is needed.

On page 13, USA does not need to be spelled out as the abbreviation US is used.
frequently prior to this use.
Reference #12 is incomplete.

**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.