Reviewer's report

Title: A needs-based method for estimating the behavioral health staff needs of community health centers

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Reviewer: Thomas R Konrad

Reviewer's report:

This article provides important information about the workforce requirements for mental health and substance abuse services in the community health sector. This is an important if highly specialized topic, and the authors make an significant, if not definitive contribution to estimating this need given the assumptions they discuss.

Quantifying the requirements for, existing supply of , and unmet need for mental health professional requires a number of specific assumptions which might be better discussed in the manuscript. For example it is important that the authors acknowledge that their estimates are rough and that they give the reader some sense of whether the point estimate they make of additional clinicians needed is more likely err on the side of being conservative (i.e., an underestimate) or something of an overestimate. The reader could be aided in this task by a fuller discussion of how each of the assumptions is likely to affect the current estimate. Although a formal sensitivity analysis would be highly desirable, even a formal statement of each of these assumptions and a tabular presentation listing each assumptions and how the direction and magnitude of the estimates might be affected should that assumption prove to be wrong. For example, if the assumption that relatively few persons with SMI currently are being served by CHC is false, then the requirement or need for mental health professionals is likely to be understated

Secondly, the model proposed and used by the authors should be more explicitly related to the other workforce models used by the VA, the military and the UNC team particularly the productivity estimates implicit in methods.

Finally, the report should acknowledge that there are federal and state workforce programs expanding the supply of mental health professionals in particular, those professionals that are “dedicated” to providing services in settings like CHCs. For example the number of mental health professionals supported through NHSC loan repayment programs more than tripled from Mar 2009 through February, 2011.** Similar patterns of growth can be found in state supported Loan Repayment program

** See Table 1. Change in the Number of Clinicians of Each Discipline in the National Health Service Corps (NHSC) Loan Repayment and Scholarship Programs during the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act Funding Period

**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:**

No competing interests financial or non-financial