Author's response to reviews

Title: The impact of economic factors on migration considerations among Icelandic specialist doctors: a cross sectional study

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Author's response to reviews: see over
Dear Editor

BMC Health Services Research                                              Oslo 10 November 2013

Thank you for the important and valuable comments from the reviewer. We have now revised the paper according to his queries per below.

Reviewer II

I recommend that the authors’ be asked to consider the following suggestions for further revision:

(a) Excision of all the material commencing on page 14 with the words “Policy makers should take our findings seriously” and ending on page 14 with “the National Medical Association.”

Comment: The page numbers we refer to are the page numbers in the ‘tracked changes’ version of the paper.

This has been removed (p. 14-15), the last four references have also been removed (p. 21-22)

..it would be better to avoid going beyond some brief statement along the lines that obviously the findings call for adequate continuing monitoring of the migration situation and call for timely consideration of appropriate strategies to cope with foreseeable problems on the part of the relevant authorities.

We have added a sentence in the end: ‘Our findings call for appropriate strategies on the part of relevant authorities, focusing on the doctors’ working conditions, such as their salaries and how cost containment influence their work.’ (p. 14)

(b) Giving a separate paragraph to the particular concerns relating to younger specialists, and noting that the survey did not gather any information regarding opinions and intentions of Icelandic doctors actually undertaking postgraduate studies abroad at the time the survey was conducted.
   From my notes on what has happened since the GFC began it appears that the major real impact on the specialist workforce may have been non-return of trainees overseas – again it would be helpful to have some numerical data but this may be difficult to obtain.

Done, text p. 10-11, new references: 27 and 28.

(c) Giving a separate paragraph to specialists who have engaged in overseas employment during their holidays.

Done, p. 13 and new reference, nr. 16 included. This reference was also included in the introduction, p. 5.
I wonder why this predictor did not appear in the original Table 3.

The reason is simply that we did not think of this variable as a part of our research aim (exploring the impact of economic factors on migration consideration), but after some considerations we think this variable is relevant and contributes to the understanding of the Icelandic doctors’ migration considerations.

The sentence in the revised text on the working-holiday people doesn’t really address the question raised by Reviewer 1 regarding consideration of intention of long-term versus short migration does it? However, it seems probable that the questionnaire did not ask for information on this point.

That is right, unfortunately we did not include questions regarding long-term versus short-term migration.

The authors’ response notes suggest banning working holidays for specialists – a very contentious suggestion!

This has been removed, p. 13.

(d) Moving the paragraph beginning “Because of Iceland’s small population” (page 12) forward to Background. Because the English expression “quite a few” often really means “quite a lot of” – such are the vagaries of the English expression – some re-wording is desirable. The second paragraph in Background could open with “Despite its small population of 320,000, Iceland’s doctor density of relatively high (one per 272 citizens). However, having only a small population, Iceland has only a small number of specialists in each specialty and so is particularly vulnerable to emigration by specialists.”

Done, p. 4.

The statistics in the rest of the paragraph, if moved from pages 12 & 13 to Background, might probably appear to some journal readers in, say, parts of Africa to indicate a very generous availability of staff.

Good point, this has been removed, p. 13-14. The reference (nr. 40) that was related to this text has been removed as well.

(e) Consideration of excising the rest of the paragraph referred to in (d) or perhaps, with some additional information to show a pre-GFC to 2010 comparison, moved to Background as further evidence of the effects of the economic crisis on the health system.

As said, this has been removed, p. 13-14.

(f) Review possible typo in the References list entries 21 (Brain or brain?)

Done, p. 19.
(g) Tidying up Table 1. To avoid confusion do not use the word “doctors” anywhere in this table or its footnotes, use “specialists” throughout. The table entry “Total* 419” is better labelled as a sub-total of your total sample. In the specialty listing I suggest “. . . administration and other stated specialty” rather than “. . . administration, and other”.

Done, p 23.

(h) Consideration of inclusion of some discussion of the literature relating to the value of a one-off “opinion and intention” type survey as an aid to decision makers.

Done, p 10, new references: 22-25.

(i) Consideration of inclusion of material relating to the developments noted in my notes above regarding events since 2010. An important point is that there is still not readily accessible information as to the actual numbers of specialists who have emigrated since 2008 nor of the scale of the reduction in return of post-graduate specialist trainees from overseas.

Done, see response to (b). Unfortunately, the Medical Association has not differentiated between specialists and non-specialists in their data. The data we have used on p. 10-11 are the best data available on Icelandic doctors’ migration.

(j) Consideration of any other further modifications suggested by Reviewer 1.
There were no further modifications.

(k) Change the Abstract to accommodate changes made in the main text.
There was no need for changes in the abstract.

We now very much hope that this manuscript can be accepted for publication in your Journal.

On behalf of all authors

Yours sincerely

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