Reviewer's report

Title: Part-time and full-time medical specialists, are there differences in allocation of time?

Version: 1 Date: 23 August 2005

Reviewer: Shelley MacDermid

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Major Compulsory Revisions

1. Almost no information is given about the measures. It is not at all clear how time use was measured and whether or not there is good evidence of the quality of the measurement. For example, the proportions of time allocated to specific tasks far exceed 100%, suggesting either that there are substantial errors in reports or that respondents were permitted to report doing multiple tasks at once. How were work hours reported?

2. Why were work hours categorized instead of using the actual fte value? Given that level of fte was offered on p. 12 as a possible explanation for findings, it seems desirable to conduct analyses with the original scaling.

3. I don’t understand the logic of the chi-squared tests in the tables. The variables being compared appear to be continuous which suggests a different test might be appropriate. What are the degrees of freedom for the tests? What are the significance levels? If these are multi-level models, how were they structured? What equations were tested? If these are chi-squared tests of nested models, what models were being compared?

Minor Essential Revisions

4. When referring to time use, the authors should be more clear about whether they are referring to amount of time or proportion of time. It is often difficult to tell which they mean. This is particularly evident in the expression of the expectations on p. 6. In general, comparisons of raw hours don’t seem to make much sense – given differences in fte, wouldn’t we expect part-time folks to spend fewer raw hours on all tasks? If not, perhaps a discussion of tasks that have fixed vs. variable time requirements is warranted.

5. Clarify use of the word ‘shifts’ by adding the modifier ‘evening or weekend’ or ‘nonstandard.’

6. I don’t understand the basis for the statement ‘we can assume that our study population is representative of [sic] the total population’ on p. 7.

7. Give more descriptive information about the range and average of ftens at the outset.

8. How many hospitals and partnerships are represented in the data?

9. Clarify on p. 8 – is the analysis two or three levels? In one place it sounds like three – physicians, partnerships and hospitals – but elsewhere (including the tables) it sounds like two – physicians and hospitals.

Discretionary Revisions
10. It’s not clear to me whether it makes sense to analyze the data separately by specialty as opposed to including an analysis variable for this purpose. I would appreciate a rationale and justification for this decision.

11. Many of the tables could be combined instead of showing separate tables for each specialty.

12. It is notable that full-timers don’t have to spend more time on paperwork when there are more part-timers, and that part-timers work proportionally more evening and weekend shifts – both of these could be benefits of part-time workers for full-timers.

13. I note that part-time radiologists report spending less time keeping up with the field – is this a concern?

14. I’m not sure there is much basis for suggesting that part-time work is a ‘uniquely Dutch phenomenon.’

What next?: Unable to decide on acceptance or rejection until the authors have responded to the major compulsory revisions

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

Quality of written English: Needs some language corrections before being published

Statistical review: No

Declaration of competing interests:

I declare that I have no competing interests