Reviewer's report

Title: The feminization of the medical work force, implications for Scottish primary care: a survey of Scottish general practitioners.

Version: 1 Date: 30 January 2006

Reviewer: Bonnie Sibbald

Reviewer's report:

General
This paper reports the time commitments of male and female Scottish general practitioners (GPs) gathered by postal questionnaire survey in May/June 2004. The principal finding is that female GPs spend significantly less time than male GPs on both general medical services (GMS) and non-GMS activities (teaching, research, etc). The findings will be relevant and important to workforce planners.

The study is generally well conducted. Response rates were above 65% which is good for a GP survey; and a comparison of responders with non-responders revealed no appreciable differences in doctors' demographic characteristics. Self-reporting of workload is naturally susceptible to bias but there is no reason to believe that there were any systematic differences in reporting between men and women. Therefore it seems likely that the reported gender differences are real.

The discussion is clear and the main conclusions are well grounded in the data. The paper is well written. The title and abstract accurately convey the content of the research.

Major Compulsory Revisions (that the author must respond to before a decision on publication can be reached)

Minor Essential Revisions (such as missing labels on figures, or the wrong use of a term, which the author can be trusted to correct)
No information is given about the methods of data analysis. It appears that simple tests of the significance of difference between two groups were used without adjustment for confounders. This not necessarily a limitation but it would be helpful to state what statistical tests were employed and which statistical package was used.

Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)
The authors rightly draw attention to the need to increase labour supply to cope with the effective reduction in workforce size brought about by feminisation. However, their findings also show that a high proportion of men choose to work less than full time (although they work more sessions than women). In addition, men were less likely than women to report an intention to increase their workload, remain in the medical workforce (as opposed to retire), or become a GP partner (if they were currently a non-principal). Two important points thus arise. The first is that workforce planners need also to adjust for less than full time working among men as well as women. The second is that women's work effort may be higher in the longer term than is suggested by this cross-sectional survey. Longitudinal work histories are needed to investigate this possibility. Neither of these points is made by the authors but merit consideration.
What next?: Accept after minor essential revisions

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

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: No

Declaration of competing interests:
I declare that I have no competing interests.