Reviewer's report

Title: How are health professionals earning their living in Malawi?

Version: 1 Date: 30 June 2006

Reviewer: Joses Kirigia

Reviewer's report:

General
This is an important study for those working in the human resources for health field. As the authors rightly indicate, much of the research to date has focussed on the emigrating human resources for health, and the research community in Sub-Saharan Africa has not given adequate attention to survival strategies employed by those still working in African countries health systems.

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)

METHODS:
The methods section is lacking in detail. If other researchers wanted to replicate the study, from the information provided, it would be a bit difficult to do so. Thus, the authors need to strengthen this section. They could explain methods used to choose the respondents. Was it done in an ad hoc manner, using statistical sampling methods, or purposively using a certain criteria? How were the respondents distributed across the districts in Malawi? In the opinion of the researchers, how generalizable are the findings? The questionnaire used should be included as an appendix for use by other researchers in future.

RESULTS:
Even though this was a qualitative study, it may be informative to provide at least frequency distribution for various challenges faced by health professionals and the survival strategies employed by health workers. Thus, the authors could include two tables. The first column would contain the challenges, the second column would contain the count (or frequency), and the third percentage.

Before Conclusion section, authors could indicate the implications of the findings for the health policy-makers in Malawi. In other words, what can the policy-makers do to improve the situation? The authors may consider referring to recently published "WHO (2006): The World Health Report 2006: Working together for health. Geneva: WHO". The report is available at the www.who.int website. They can obtain the document also at the WHO Country Office in Malawi.

What next?: Accept after minor essential revisions

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

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.