Reviewer's report

Title: Should I stay or should I go? Team climate and propensity to leave among hospital employees

Version: 1 Date: 18 January 2007

Reviewer: Bonnie Sibbald

Reviewer's report:

General

This paper reports the association between team climate and intentions to quit in the health care workforce and will therefore be of interest to human resource managers.

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

The authors theorise that team climate predicts intention to quit and that intention to quit predicts actual leaving. A major limitation of this study is that it was confined to people who did not leave between baseline and follow-up. It is therefore impossible to determine whether team climate (or intention to quit) predicts actual leaving. An added concern is that those included in the study declared no intention to quit at baseline – so presumably they had (on average) a better team climate than the cohort as a whole and/or were determined to stay despite an adverse team climate. This makes them unusual/atypical. It would have been much more valuable to measure whether team climate at baseline predicted actual quit rates at follow-up. I presume this was not done because the investigators were unable to trace people who had left. However, I note that current (follow up) team climate appears to be a better predictor of intention to quit than previous (baseline) climate – particularly among women (table 2). This suggests that team climate may be a weak predictor of leaving in the longer term (if not the short term). The limitations of censoring the cohort (by excluding people who intended to leave at baseline and not tracing all original participants at follow-up) need more fully to be discussed.

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Minor Essential Revisions (such as missing labels on figures, or the wrong use of a term, which the author can be trusted to correct)

1. Rename ‘propensity’ to leave as ‘intention’ to leave throughout the paper because the former term suggests that the study examined actual leaving rates when it did not.

2. Gender is declared as a covariate in one paragraph of the methods (survey measures) but the sexes are treated separately in the analysis.

3. Some variables are not clearly defined in operational terms. I.e. job tenure (years employed by organisation?); occupation (doctor, nurse, other?); and health status (described as dichotomous but appears to have at least 3 levels).

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Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)

1. The method of calculating cumulative team climate loses ‘information’ by first recoding climate into quartiles and then summing the quartile ranks. A more sensitive way to explore the hypothesis that team climate predicts intention to quit would have been to measure the change in team climate from baseline to follow-up for each person, and then see whether this ‘change score’ predicted intention to quit at follow-up. People intending to quit at baseline should be included in this analysis. The expectation is that adverse changes in team climate increase the likelihood people want to leave; while improvements in team climate reduce the likelihood people want to leave.

2. The ‘results’ and ‘discussion’ might usefully be separated into two sections, instead of being combined.
Unable to decide on acceptance or rejection until the authors have responded to the major compulsory revisions

Level of interest: An article of limited interest

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

Statistical review: No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

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