Reviewer's report

Title: Improving Motivation and Retention of Health Professionals in Developing Countries: A Systematic Review

Version: 2 Date: 6 July 2008

Reviewer: Mario Dal Poz

Reviewer's report:

This is a very welcoming contribution to an area of scarce research and evidence based policies and interventions.

The questions were well defined, although the background could be better developed, for instance, using the World Health Report 2006 WHO, 2006). The authors also should mention the internal migration (rural/urban, public/private), that is, at least, as important as international migration.

The method is appropriate and well described, however the list of key works should include nursing, health personnel and other MESH terms. Also, the databases searched could include databases of social sciences and humanities, as human resources management may have more published articles out of health than in health journals.

The data is sounded and the manuscript adhere to the relevant standards for reporting and data deposition.

The discussion and conclusions are well balanced and adequately supported by the data, even if they don't help too much. The conclusion is a bit simplistic and the authors should explain that the priority for research on Human Resources for Health is due to the importance of the problems faced by health systems at country level (e.g. not able to achieve MDG) and the lack of evidence for policy decision. The authors have enough material to make this statement. In addition, the fact that most of the studies are exploratory, lacking field-test, case-control or quasi-experimental studies, shown how low is the level of research in this field. The limitations of the work are clearly stated (e.g. language)

The authors acknowledge the work upon which they are building, both published and unpublished, with the exception of the WHR 2006.

The title could be more precise, mentioning doctors and nurses, rather than "health professionals" that could mislead the focus of the analysis.

The writing is acceptable.

Minor Essential Revisions suggested:
- To move the table 2 footnotes to the paragraph on "themes identified within the included studies", that will help the understanding of the different themes.
- The last sentence on the "Methodological Quality Assessment" may have missing words or are part of the previous sentence.
- The adaptation of the appraisals form is very good, but as not all readers may know very well the Cochrane Review structure or the appraisals for, it may be useful to explain the meaning of the letters (what about formatting in bold the corresponding word (e.g. random in "R: Was a random sample taken?")

**Level of interest:** An article of importance in its field

**Quality of written English:** Acceptable

**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.